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TWO
LETTERS,

ADDRESSED TO THE

Right Rev. PRELATES.

[PRICE TWO SHILLINGS.]

In the Preſs,

A LETTER to Dr. BALGUY, on the Subject of his Charge delivered to the Archdeaconry of Wincheſter in the Year 1772. By JOHN PALMER.

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TWO

LETTERS,

ADDRESSED TO THE

Right Rev. PRELATES,

WHO A SECOND TIME REJECTED THE

DISSENTERS' BILL.

LONDON,

Printed for J. JOHNSON, No. 72, St. Paul's Church-Yard.

MDCCLXXIII.

1025

LETTER I.

MY LORDS,

THE zealous and active part you have taken in the defeat of an application to parliament for liberty of conſcience, intitles you to particular notice and diſtinction, and is the reaſon of my thus publicly addreſſing you.

Though you have denied us redreſs, you have not taken away the liberty of complaining, nor deſtroyed the force of any of thoſe principles upon which our bill was grounded. We generally find the intelligent part of mankind think nearly alike, the ſame views of juſtice, utility and benevolence, lead to the ſame

concluſions. The ſame motives and arguments which influence the reſolutions of one branch of the legiſlature, moſt commonly influence the other. How it happens that religion ſhould be an exception to this rule, that there ſhould be ſuch an unfortunate variance, on a ſubject not difficult to be underſtood, and that the ſame requeſt ſhould be reaſonable and juſt in one place, and the reverſe in another, is a difficulty which I cannot account for, conſiſtently with that veneration which I wiſh always to feel for my ſuperiors.

You have now leiſure, my lords, to review the glory of your triumph, and to meditate on the improvement of your victory; your ſucceſs will not be complete unleſs it be purſued. If the love of your country, the intereſts of religion, and the glory of God, have animated your oppoſition, you ought to advance farther. If you have been governed by other views, you have gone too far.

far. If diſſenters are a dangerous body, and their doctrines deſtructive to ſociety, you ought not to be ſatisfied with checking and reſtraining them: perſecution and baniſhment are the gentleſt treatment they deſerve. But if their indulgence has done no injury to church or ſtate, as long experience has ſhewn, what advantage could you propoſe by continuing the odium of penal laws without intending to execute them?

I ſhould have imagined that ſeparate from all motives of good nature, independent of all candour, humanity, and chriſtianity, common prudence and policy would have taught you to grant an unlimited toleration, as the moſt plauſible and effectual method of ſtrengthening your eſtabliſhment, and weakening your adverſaries. What have you accompliſhed by your late ſignal oppoſition? You have reflected no honour upon yourſelves, either in your civil or eccleſiaſtical capacity; you have given the world rea-

ſon to rejoice that your power is limited, and that you are not lords over our property as well as our faith. You have convinced us, that bigotry and ſpiritual deſpotiſm are not totally annihilated, and notwithſtanding the freedom and liberal ſentiments of the preſent times, that a very little encouragement would revive the tragedies of martyrdom again.

Had you only gratified your reſentments in diſappointing the hopes which a certain body of proteſtants entertained, and that upon the conſciouſneſs of their own loyalty, and the benevolence of their ſovereign, it would not have been of any great moment, we could have ſubmitted to our fate, from the remembrance of the ſufferings which conſcientious men have met with in all ages; but the wound you have given is more deep and laſting; you have ſtigmatized with infamy a religion which we truſt in God will flouriſh whether we riſe or fall; you have prohibited Chriſtianity itſelf, and

paſſed

paſſed a cenſure upon the inſpired writings, as if they were a cover to every pernicious doctrine, and the preaching of them inconſiſtent with the welfare of ſociety, unleſs modelled according to the articles of your church.—How you can reconcile your conduct to the love of truth, and a regard for religion, I beg your lordſhips ſeriouſly to conſider.

The proſpect of higher dignity, and the applauſe of your dependents, may ſooth and flatter you a while, but in a little time you will be upon a level with thoſe whom you have injured, and you muſt anſwer before the judge of quick and dead for the ſcandal you have thrown upon the goſpel.

In the courſe of this letter I ſhall endeavour to anſwer the objections that have been urged againſt the extenſion of toleration, that at leaſt, if I cannot convince your lordſhips, the impartial public may ſee the merits of our cauſe, and be

enabled to judge concerning the motives upon which it has been rejected.

It has been condemned as a diſtruſt of the legiſlature to apply for relief from the terror of penal laws, which neither *are*, nor ought to be put in execution.

Is it, my lords, a credit to any ſtate to preſerve laws which ought not to be executed, or can a better reaſon be aſſigned for their repeal? To be tenacious of retaining them contrary to all the reaſons of juſtice and humanity, diſcovers at leaſt an opinion of their propriety, and a deſign to enforce them at ſome convenient opportunity; but admitting that theſe ſuſpicions are groundleſs, why ſhould any but delinquents lie at the mercy of a precarious connivance? Why ſhould proteſtant diſſenters be denied that legal ſecurity which all other men enjoy? Diſcretion is the law of tyrants, and none but ſlaves ought to be ſubject to it. God forbid we ſhould owe our liberty to a

diſpenſing power. We rejected it once with contempt; and I hope we ſhall always do it upon the ſame principles.

But admitting we ought to be content with the merciful diſpoſition of our governors, this is no laſting ſecurity. The prince who fills the throne, and the miniſters who ſurround it, are not immortal; we ſhall not always have ſo mild an adminiſtration, *ſo candid a bench of biſhops*, or ſo catholic a body of clergy; every age does not produce men ſo tender in the exerciſe of power, and ſo averſe to take the advantage of the law. The common people, in other times, may be leſs diſintereſted and unprejudiced, and may make gain of information, and then, my lords, where is our liberty? Will you engage to protect us? I am ſtrangely miſtaken if the whole legiſlature of Great Britain could afford us any relief, unleſs by the ſame methods which would give us a certain and eſtabliſhed ſecurity. I appeal then to your lordſhips, whether

our application has been raſh, improper, or diſtruſtful, and whether we could have been ſilent without betraying a conſciouſneſs of guilt, a deſert of ſlavery, and an indifference to poſterity.

For the honour of our government, no laws ought to remain which cannot be juſtified; and the idea of dormant ſtatutes lying in ambuſh for future imaginary contingencies, is a reproach to our conſtitution. The advantage *we* ſhould derive from the repeal of theſe penal laws is nothing to the benefit and honour that would reſult from thence both to the ſtate and the church, by preſerving peace and ſoftening and reconciling the minds of a multitude of ſubjects.

To refuſe a requeſt, where the object is no more than a compliance with an innocent ſcruple, and where no dangers are to be apprehended, is undoubtedly declining an eaſy method of acquiring reputation, and reputation is power.

It can be no man's intereſt to hurt a ſtate where he is as free as he ought to be; and Chriſtianity muſt rather flouriſh than decay, when all perſons are ſuffered to follow its dictates without controul. What then can be the pretence for intimidating us by dread, when we are capable of being influenced by the nobleſt of all principles, gratitude and affection? If there ever was a ſovereign on whoſe benevolent heart a people might implicitly rely with ſafety, mankind need not aſk the ſecurity of laws; but the prince who deſerves ſuch a confidence would be the firſt to diſclaim it, and would never think his glory abridged by the loſs of a power to do harm. When we recollect the wanton cruelty of the Stuarts, we cannot help bleſſing the unmoleſted eaſe of later times; though perſecution has not loſt its ſting, we can ſit under our vine and fig-tree; but why ſhould the ſword of Damocles hang over our head to ſpoil our repoſe? It is an inſult upon

us,

us, to ſuppoſe we ſhould forget the dangers we are expoſed to ; we cannot contemplate fines and impriſonment, though ever ſo contingent, with ſatisfaction ; we cannot be reconciled to ſuch diſcipline, however ſalutary you may think it ; we cannot look upon ſuch a ſituation to be neceſſary either to our preſent peace or final happineſs ; we cannot conceive why the unfortunate belief of mere opinions ſhould make ſo immenſe a diſtinction between the ſubjects of the ſame realm. Alas ! my lords, we have loſt our ancient ſpirit ; we have felt the bleſſings of quiet and freedom, and have been accuſtomed to the worſhip of God without the idea of guilt or the apprehenſion of fear ; ſo that perſecution would return with additional horror ; we are become fond of the protection of law, otherwiſe we might be thankful for the very *ſhadow* of liberty, and think our precarious ſituation far better than we deſerved.

You may, perhaps, hold it proper, while you deſtroy the inquiſition, to reſerve the inſtruments of torture, aſſuring us, at the ſame time, that you will never make uſe of them; that we may ſafely depend upon your generoſity; for you would not for the world inflict any pains for conſcience ſake. All this is infinitely obliging; but, you know, the faith of an emperor was broken to one of the reformers; Charles II. forgot his declaration at Breda; and experience gives us but little encouragement to repoſe confidence in the honour of the moſt exalted characters. The comfort of the meaneſt individual in ſociety ought not depend upon caprice and courteſy; and we ſhould be unworthy of liberty, if we did not aſk it upon the only terms which can render it permanent and honourable.

The church has diſcovered a ſurpriſing reluctance to abandon any prerogative, however unjuſtly uſurped, or unfit to be exerciſed. How meekly it has ruled, hiſtory ſpeaks aloud in every page.

I proceed, my lords, to conſider the nature of that toleration we aſk, which, I doubt not, will appear as reaſonable to every candid judge as that which we now enjoy. If you allow us to diſpute your right in decreeing rites and ceremonies, you muſt much more allow us to queſtion your authority in matters of faith, becauſe it is the duty of Chriſtians to acknowledge no infallible interpreter in the grand and leading principles of the goſpel, and to be moderate and candid in matters of inferior moment, for the ſake of peace and harmony.

An uncomplying temper in trifles may look like humour and captiouſneſs ; but an oppoſition to the aſſumed power of determining the eſſential doctrines of faith is an indiſpenſable part of integrity. We muſt diſclaim all reverence for truth and religion, and all regard to the ſupremacy of Chriſt, before we admit any ſtandard of faith beſides the Holy Scriptures.

What reaſon can be given, why pleas of conſcience ſhould be valid, with reſpect to the forms of church government, and the manner in which Chriſtian ordinances ſhould be adminiſtered, and have no weight in things which accompany ſalvation? Our anceſtors were, it is true, content with the former; but have they precluded us from ſeeking farther indulgence?

To the whole world we appeal, whether any inducements but thoſe of conſcience could have prevailed upon us to decline all the offers of a well-endowed eſtabliſhment, for an unpopular party of Chriſtians, among whom we can never expect any thing better than a mere ſubſiſtence?

Why then are we ſtill to be under reſtraint? Have we rendered ourſelves unworthy of future indulgence by abuſing the favours we have received? This is not alledged againſt us by our bittereſt enemies. Have we made any inroads

upon

upon the church? We have engaged in no controverſies about it, except in ſelf-defence. Is it eſſential to the preſervation of the eſtabliſhment, to require an aſſent to its doctrines? You know, my lords, it wants no ſuch ſecurity; and if it did, it is prepoſterous to expect ſuch an uniformity.

Therefore, the preſent law of toleration requiring ſubſcription, is partial and imperfect, and, inſtead of anſwering any good purpoſe, does religion the greateſt harm, by impoſing a needleſs teſt, and exerciſing an obnoxious power, which ought always to be avoided.

It matters not how we came to differ ſo widely from the nonconformiſts of the laſt age. We impute it to the improvements of knowledge, and a more free and careful diſcuſſion of the Scriptures. Whether we are miſtaken or no, God is the judge; to his bar only we are accountable; and to his righteous ſentence we ſubmit; you have no right to uſurp his

his province, or to execute his displeasure.

We are not the only persons who have swerved from the public criterion ; your own members are chargeable with this heresy ; and if tests and subscriptions, with all the allurements of honour and interest, cannot maintain implicit faith within your own bosom, how should you expect it among strangers who have no inducement to profess what they do not believe, or to conceal what they do ?

No persons can, with any propriety, be said to enjoy liberty of conscience who are limited in their enquiries, and bound to assent to certain systems of faith, whether they believe them or not, unless it can be proved that the articles of the church are self-evident, and that a dissent from them can, in no instance whatever, be pleaded as a matter of conscience, which, I believe, your lordships will not maintain.

To say we shall subscribe your opinions, and then we may follow our own ;

that

that we ſhall acknowledge your definitions of orthodoxy, and then we may conſult the Sacred Scriptures, is only tantalizing us with imaginary freedom. If we have any doubts about a few unmeaning ceremonies, we ſhall be indulged with our ſcruples; but if we heſitate about things of greater moment, then we ſhall feel your reſentment. If we will give our unfeigned aſſent to every doctrinal point which is demanded, only to prevent us from being perplexed about the unſearchable counſels of God, we ſhall not be controlled or moleſted in the exerciſe of our religion. What is this but aſſerting, that if we will but renounce our liberty in every important matter, we ſhall be free? What is this but a contradiction in terms? Is this, my lords, all the toleration the beſt conſtituted church in Chriſtendom can afford? Call it not by ſo amiable a name; it is unworthy of our religion and our government; it is an indignity to our underſtandings; it is a ridi-

ridiculous abuſe of language, a piece of mockery which a Turk or a Papiſt would bluſh at. Avow your deſign openly, and tell us, that you did not mean toleration, but uniformity; and that you was reſolved to promote it in the ſame manner that all eſtabliſhments had done before you.

To this end, what is wanting in perſuaſion, you ſupply by terror; you ſatisfy all ſcruples by a fine, and reſolve all doubts by impriſonment; you improve upon the plan of Chriſt and his apoſtles; and while they employed reaſon in propagating their religion, you make men's policy and intereſt ſubſervient to their converſion.

The queſtion at preſent is not about what degree of freedom contented our anceſtors, but what is right in itſelf and agreeable to reaſon and Chriſtianity? whether we are governed by faction and obſtinacy in the requeſt we make, or by juſtice and the common ſentiment of

mankind? whether Chriſt, or his ſubſtitutes, ſhall be ultimate arbiters in religion? whether force and numbers are to fix the limits of truth? whether any man can be ſaid to have a true faith, who believes only out of fear, or faſhion, or intereſt? whether diſputable points are fit to be eſtabliſhed as a national creed? On the determination of theſe queſtions we build our claim to the free and full exerciſe of our religion; but we find it in vain to demonſtrate our rights, while you are armed with a power which cannot be reſiſted. You cannot anſwer our objections, and yet you will not indulge them; you are afraid openly to perſecute, and as unwilling openly to tolerate; and thus, with a conſtitution you cannot defend, and power you dare not exert, you have recourſe to the infamous expedient of a ceſſation of hoſtilities, without an actual pacification, and without reducing that formidable armament which may be brought into action againſt us in an hour when we are not aware.

This is the true ſpirit of bigotry, which adheres invariably to uſage and cuſtom, and, without either wiſdom to diſcern the propriety of reformation, or courage to riſk its conſequences, creeps on in the ſame ſervile tract from age to age, ſacrificing every thing to ambition, eaſe, and political tranquility. Hence it happens, that while every uſeful art and ſcience keep advancing to perfection, in religion, the moſt intereſting ſubject to human nature, there is no improvement, but all things continue as they were from the beginning. You have received the creed of your anceſtors as a ſacred depoſit, and you have preſerved it without the ſhadow of a change; in vain have philoſophy, reaſon, and learning pointed out its blemiſhes and defects; in vain do common ſenſe and the ſuffrages of the people call aloud for amendment; you glorioufly maintain your reſolution never to add or diminiſh one tittle; and tho' enthuſiaſm on the one hand, and infidelity on the other,

are making bold advances upon you, you will neither capitulate nor defend yourſelves.

If ſome of your members are diſcontented, you pacify them with the artful rumor of an alteration; but the project ſoon ſubſides, and all is fixed again. Sometimes foreign or domeſtic troubles furniſh an excuſe for your inactivity; and one pretence or another is always at hand to palliate your indifference. Thus, like the laws of the Perſians, your ordinances are immutable; and if reformation is to wait for your conſent, will, I fear, remain ſo world without end.

My lords, if you conſider the diſſenters as partiſans in religion, who have no motive for their ſeparation but a ſplenetic petulant moroſeneſs, and who only ſeek to eſtabliſh one church on the ruins of another, you do them much wrong. The greateſt blemiſh we ſee in any church is intolerance; and the greateſt beauty, charity. We have obſerved all

parties,

parties, in their turn, adopt and diſclaim wholeſome ſeverities ; all ſects have had their tyrants and their martyrs.

The American exiles ſtained the merit of their integrity with perſecution ; and we ourſelves have not been without our inquiſition and ſtar-chamber in miniature, to keep in awe the conſciences of our brethren and dependants ; but experience has convinced us, and I hope it will in time all mankind, that charity is one of the fundamentals of Chriſtianity ; and that no religion is worth preſerving that can only be maintained by force and injuſtice. We will not diſturb the peace of ſociety about trifles, if they are not magnified by inſolent bigotry and ſanguinary zeal ; we will ſacrifice every thing but truth and the rights of human nature to public order and decorum.

We can diſapprove ſome parts of your conſtitution without violence; we can differ from you, and yet acknowledge your merit ; we can read many things in

your ſervice with admiration; we ingenuouſly and readily confeſs, that you are the firſt and the beſt of all eſtabliſhed churches; and we ſhould bluſh for a ſeparation from you, which had any thing leſs for its object than the duty of all Chriſtians, to obey the dictates of conſcience, to aſſert their private judgment, and to ſtand faſt in the liberty in which Chriſt has made them free.

I will promiſe you, my lords, for myſelf, and I think I can for every diſſenter in this kingdom, that we will never uſe any weapons againſt your conſtitution but thoſe which reaſon and argument furniſh; and I wiſh every unfair and ungenerous method of attack were to be univerſally diſclaimed by the conſent of all ſects and parties; then would our controverſies be uſeful and honourable, truth would prevail, and virtue be the reſult of our enquiries; there would be no neceſſity for diſſimulation; knowledge would not be checked by fear; and though ſome

might

might be unfortunate in their opinions, none would ſuffer for conſcience ſake.

I ſhall now, my lords, conſider ſome exceptions which have been made againſt the diſſenters propoſed declaration of their belief in Chriſtianity, which has been repreſented as fallacious and uncertain, and amounting to no ſecurity at all.

In the days of paganiſm, it might be aſſerted, that the enmity of a Chriſtian to gentile ſuperſtition and idolatry rendered him a bad member of ſociety, and unfit to be tolerated; but one would not think the original principles of our religion were ſo far loſt and forgotten, as to occaſion a doubt whether they are inconſiſtent with government or no. Chriſtianity has been diſputed and contemned by its enemies; but to charge it with the guilt of being *dangerous* was reſerved for its advocates and champions. I am perſuaded that the goſpel of our Lord, while it gives us the moſt rational hope of the happineſs of a future ſtate, prepares us

for it by every ſentiment and virtue that can adorn a public or a private ſtation, and conſequently that it forms the beſt citizen, and is moſt conducive to order and good government.

But if the profeſſion of Chriſtianity gives no title to the protection of the civil power, let it be diſpenſed with, and let toleration be granted without any reſerve or limitation whatever, according to the rights of mankind. The diſſenters have no ſcruple in ſignifying the rank and claſs they belong to in ſociety; but I am perſuaded they never meant by their declaration to allow the right of the magiſtrate to demand of them any teſt in matters of religion; and I hope, if they ſollicit parliament any more, it will be for an abſolute and unconditional repeal of religious penalties, and for the ſame unreſerved freedom their brethren in Ireland enjoy.

We ſhould think it a ſtrange conceſſion in a country where our houſes cannot be entered

entered by force with impunity, to conſent, that the receſſes of our boſom ſhould be invaded, the ſecrets of our heart rifled and expoſed: our thoughts and principles are ſupremely independent of any civil power.

When we injure our fellow-citizens, we fall under its cognizance; till then, we ought to range free and unconfined wherever truth leads, otherwiſe every perſecution in the world may be defended; for it is of little moment *what* teſts the magiſtrate impoſes, if he impoſes any; he has as much right to enforce one as another. I am never ſafe but whilſt his authority is confined to actual offences againſt the peace of ſociety. This diſtinction is plain, obvious, and ſufficient, and will for ever keep religion and government from being confounded together, or invading each other.

God forbid I ſhould contend for a toleration that would exclude one honeſt man on the face of the earth, whatever he

he believes, and I will venture to ſay, however this latitude may ſtartle ſome ignorant or bigoted minds, the more it is conſidered, the more it will be approved, till the reaſonableneſs of it is as univerſally admitted as the cleareſt axiom in nature; with theſe diſtinctions, the diſſenters are ready to profeſs their belief of the ſcriptures, at the ſame time pitying thoſe who contend for ſomething ſafer and better, and abhorring the thought of attempting to change any man's opinion by force or compulſion.

Againſt the ſufficiency of a ſcripture confeſſion, it is urged, that innumerable errors have taken ſhelter under the countenance of holy writ; but unleſs the obvious interpretation of it betrays men into falſe and abſurd doctrines, no objection can be made againſt their being the beſt ſtandard of faith, and the beſt rule of public preaching. They have an authority which no human inſtitution can boaſt of, and the evils they have occaſion-

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ed have ariſen from their being diſcourag-ed and ſuppreſſed, and from their being not impartially open to inſpection and enquiry.

It is the fate of all written language to be miſunderſtood by the ignorant, and perverted by the wicked; and you can-not point out one teſt hitherto appointed, which has not been liable to the ſame abuſe; and if inſpiration cannot ſecure men from miſtake, what can we expect from compoſitions of human device. If our errors affect our conduct in ſociety, we are accountable to the law. If they only reſpect our future well-being, that is a matter of conſcience, and belongs to the author of our faith. Chriſt has not delegated * to any body of men to alter, amend,

* There was a law in Rome, that no god ſhould be worſhipped without the conſent of the ſenate; upon which Tertullian ſays, " niſi homini Deus placuerit Deus non erit."

When the bill for ſuppreſſing blaſphemy was brought into the houſe of lords, it was oppoſed by lord Peter-borough,

amend, or ſupply what is deficient in his religion, he does not implore the ſecular arm to convert men to truth, or to keep them in it; and the orthodoxy that is promoted by ſetting up a public criterion, and keeping it ſacred by pains and penalties, may be called a parliamentary faith, but cannot be called a Chriſtian faith.

If there be any ſuch thing as a rational and defenſible ſubſcription, it muſt be to the ſcriptures, and the ſcriptures only. If I ſubmit my judgment, it ſhall be to the authority of God, and not of man. Your pretence, my lords, to dictate to me what ſenſe I ſhall put upon the ſacred oracles, is a manifeſt uſurpation. You claim the countenance of the civil power

borough, who ſaid, that though he was for a parliamentary king, he did not deſire to have a parliamentary God, or a parliamentary religion; and if the houſe were for ſuch a one, he would go to Rome and endeavour to be choſen a cardinal, for he had rather ſit in the conclave than with their lordſhips upon thoſe terms. Parl. Debates, vol. viii. p. 49.

to juſtify you in it, and then you conſtrue my diſobedience to your arbitrary decrees into a contempt of the ſtate, and to alarm the magiſtrate, you give a long liſt of the abſurdities which ſcripture, when falſely explained, may give birth to.

Good God! that men who profeſs to to call this thy word, ſhould ſpeak of it in ſuch terms; what could they ſay worſe of the koran of Mahomet, or the arranteſt impoſture that ever exiſted?

If you cannot charge the diſſenters with advancing doctrines inconſiſtent with morality, common ſenſe, and civil government, (I ſpeak not of dark ages, when almoſt all knowledge and truth were buried under ſcholaſtic ſyſtems of divinity, but of the preſent, when every thing is rejected which cannot ſtand the teſt of reaſon) the oblique inſinuation of the clergy, that we have ſome dark deſigns in reſerve, which we want to conceal under the diſguiſe of aſſenting to the ſcriptures, betrays a total want of ingenuity and candour.

I appeal to your lordſhips, whether the doctrines preached by the diſſentient clergy are falſe, ſeditious, or immoral, and yet they profeſs to build them on the ſenſe of ſcripture; they may ſometimes be tinctured with enthuſiaſm, but it is peaceful and innocent. Are not their diſcourſes often adopted by the miniſters of the eſtabliſhment, as judicious, manly, pious, and in every reſpect worthy of being delivered to a Chriſtian auditory. You ſee the ſcriptures do not always lead men into ſuperſtition and abſurdity; and when ever they do, it is when they are conſulted under the influence of early prejudices.

God forbid the revelation he has given ſhould be of ſo ambiguous a nature as to leave the moſt obvious points of morality obſcure and uncertain.

We ſhould have very little reaſon to be thankful for a more excellent rule than the light of nature, if that rule for want of being ſufficiently explained, only tend-

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ed to confound our ideas of juſtice and truth, and required all the wit and learning of man to guard it againſt abuſe. How long did Chriſtianity ſubſiſt, and what miſchief did it produce in its primitive ſtate? It was a long time before creeds and teſts were invented, and one part of the ſame church claimed a right to domineer over another, and I believe religion and morality were in as ſure and flouriſhing a ſtate as they have ever been ſince they have been ſo accurately defined and fenced round by penal laws. I have ſo much confidence in the care Providence has taken of public inſtruction, as to believe the ſcriptures will never occaſion any material errors in faith or practice. I can never allow the church of Rome to have the leaſt reſemblance with the native ſimplicity of the goſpel. When that enormous ſyſtem of pride, ambition, and tyranny was projected, it was thought neceſſary to give it ſome colour, at leaſt of ſacred extraction; and, therefore, all the nerves

of ſophiſtry were ſtrained to trace out ſuch an origin, many texts were interpolated, and others were perverted from their plain obvious meaning, the apocryphal books were called in aid, falſe tranſlations were adopted, and, with infinite refinement and artifice, the book of God was compelled to give countenance to forgery, craft, and blaſphemy: but as ſoon as the clergy had reached the utmoſt extent of the people's patience and credulity, and the Bible became the teſt of truth, this enormous fabric was ſhook to its foundations; and, as archbiſhop Tillotſon expreſſes himſelf, that which the church of Rome ſhould find fault with if they durſt, is that there ſhould be any ſuch book in the world as the Bible; and, at the bottom, if they would ſpeak out, the quarrel is againſt the ſcriptures themſelves.

Now, my lords, how far your ſubſtituting any criterion of faith and doctrine in the room of the ſacred oracles, juſtifies

fies a ſuſpicion of your being governed by ſimilar views and motives, I leave the world to judge.

There cannot be a ſtronger proof of the ſcriptures containing the beſt doctrines, than the enmity which impoſture has conceived againſt them, nor of their being fully clear and ſufficient to regulate our judgment and practice, than the neceſſity there is to take ſo much pains to darken and perplex them, before they can promote any ſiniſter deſigns.

It may be the intereſt of political prieſts to tamper with them, to ſanctify opinions which they wiſh to palm upon a deluded populace. It cannot be ours; we addreſs ourſelves to perſons who have an equal right of private judgment, and who will not give up their underſtandings, ſo that if we had any intereſt to deceive, it is out of our power; but we have no intereſt ſeparate from the cauſe of truth, and the advancement of knowledge and virtue, and theſe views muſt

for ever debar us from abuſing the privilege we contend for.

It is impoſſible for words to paint the image of our thoughts with ſuch a degree of accuracy and preciſion, as to exclude the danger of a miſtake; and, therefore, the utmoſt indulgence is due to the many errors which ignorance, prejudice, and miſconception muſt occaſion, and if this uſe had always been made of the imperfection of language, we ſhould have had no reaſon to regret it, but it has furniſhed a plea to papiſts for ſetting up an infallible expoſitor, and to proteſtants for introducing articles of faith; yet that infallible expounder wants an interpreter, and theſe articles ſtand in need of other articles to explain them, ſo that we are as much at a loſs as when we had nothing to truſt to but the original texts.

It is a point far from being ſettled what is the object of ſubſcription; ſome writers tell us, that the articles are to be aſſented to as articles of peace; others,

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that we prevaricate, unleſs we admit them with a cordial and unfeigned belief; one party contends, that we may ſubſcribe them according to any ſenſe we can put upon them, and another binds us down to the ſtrict grammatical meaning. By a reſolution of the houſe of commons they are declared Calviniſtical, yet Laud and the high churchmen of king Charles the Firſt were profeſſed Arminians.

Wide and numerous as mens opinions are, they agree in one thing—to ſubſcribe*; without this there can be no ordination, no preferment, no eccleſiaſtical dignity; and whether you are ac-

* Biſhop Gibſon complains, that the advocates for the Arian doctrine did not decline promotion on account of their not being able to ſubſcribe, upon which Whiſton obſerves, that though he himſelf had always, and Dr. Clarke and Mr. Jackſon did after ſome time refuſe all preferment which required that ſubſcription, yet ſuch examples are very rare, and the generality ſeem by their practice to approve of Lord King's grand expedient, not to loſe their uſefulneſs for ſcruples. Whiſton's Memoirs.

quainted with them, or totally ignorant about their contents; whether you are doubtful or confident, a believer of a few or of all, you muſt declare your acquieſcence without ſcruple or reſerve. How ſuch proceedings can be reconciled with ſtrict honour and integrity, how you can arrive at the ſame end through ſuch a variety of means, I leave every honeſt man of all other profeſſions to determine. If there ſhould be found a more liberal and ingenuous mind who is ſtartled at this difficulty, he is treated more as an object of ridicule than veneration; and yet I am perſuaded a ſenſe of rectitude and truth will never be ſo far extinguiſhed, as to ſuffer ſuch inconſiſtency to paſs uncenſured; nor can it happen even in this unprincipled age, but that a profeſſion which is founded in falſhood muſt end in ſhame and contempt.

Attend to the diſcourſes of your clergy, compare the different ſentiments which

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are announced from the ſame pulpit, and tell me, my lords, what you have gained by ſuperadding a teſt to the holy ſcriptures. Peace and harmony ?—no; uniformity of doctrine ?—no; the advancement of the proteſtant intereſt ?—no; the ſuppreſſion of hereſy ?—no. The very method you take to prevent variety of opinions, only multiplies them the more; for there will always be a diſpoſition in human nature to revolt againſt a faith eſtabliſhed by law, and to encounter doctrines which are ſupported by force. What then have you accompliſhed by ſubſcription? You have increaſed diſſimulation and hypocriſy, chicanery and ignorance; you have taught candidates for holy orders to ſhut their eyes againſt knowledge, and to tremble at conviction; you have made it neceſſary to invent jeſuitical ſubtleties to juſtify that conduct, which, in ſpite of all that has been written by a Balguy, a Powell, or a Hallifax,

will be treated by the world in the manner it deſerves.

But ſuppoſe it was neceſſary to compel all the ſubjects of this realm to embrace the ſame faith, have you fixed upon the moſt uſeful doctrines? I do not mean to diſcuſs the merits of your conſtitution, or to derogate from the character of the reformers who framed it, but with the utmoſt veneration for the wiſdom of antiquity, will you, my lords, maintain its perfection, will you aſſert it to be the moſt agreeable to the ſcriptures, and the moſt conducive to piety and virtue of any ſyſtem that human genius is capable of deviſing*? If not, why will you

* With the pure, Chriſtianity will be pure, and they that are otherwiſe will ſoon defile it, will either corrupt it with fables and abſurd traditions, or turn it into licentiouſneſs and carnal policy, as was evidently the caſe under the Roman empire, and might be ſhewn to be ſo more or leſs under every human eſtabliſhment,—there are men who ſee and lament the conſequences of long neglecting to review eſtabliſhments, and ſuffering the public wiſdom of paſt ages to ſerve here, and here only

you ſupport it by methods which reaſon abhors, which Chriſtianity diſclaims, and which the moſt undeniable truths have no right to make uſe of.

Another reaſon which has been urged in behalf of a late determination is, that it was an act of ſelf-defence againſt men who had formed deep deſigns againſt the peace of the church. I have heard it inſinuated, that if the bill had been granted, the trumpet of hereſy would be ſounded, the church would be overturned, and the dreadful tragedy of the laſt century acted over again. Perſons muſt be

only, for all following ones. They think there has been ſo much wood, hay, ſtubble, built on the foundations, as muſt take a conſiderable time to be removed, eſpecially where they ſee ſome get no farther yet, than to doubt whether there be occaſion to have any thing at all removed, or even to deny that there is reaſon either for attempting or ſo much as wiſhing farther reformation. But there are few chriſtian princes who lay theſe things to heart, and divines have quite other things in their thoughts; their great buſineſs is to maintain what is eſtabliſhed, and to diſpute with thoſe who find fault with it. Biſhop Law's Theory of Religion.

little acquainted with hiſtory to aſcribe the calamities of paſt times to a free and unlimited indulgence of religion, when it is evident, the leaſt relaxation of that rigour with which the moſt fooliſh ſuperſtitions were proſecuted, would have reconciled the puritans, and kept the church ſecure whatever became of the ſtate. To throw out the idea of danger, my lords, is either a mark of folly or wickedneſs.

I am convinced the oratory of all the diſſenting miniſters in this kingdom could not prevail upon one man to attempt ſo ridiculous a project as that of pulling down the hierarchy.

If any thing could add to your ſecurity in having ſo many able guardians in the upper houſe of parliament, and ſo much power and influence in the kingdom; it would have been a generous and ready compliance with the favour we ſollicited; it would have added nothing to our intereſt, weight, or numbers; and I ſhould think it beyond

yond the conception of the wildeſt imagination in nature to form any terror, or to dread any evil from this poor ſcanty act of humanity *.

What advantage do you derive from ſeeing your fellow-creatures oppreſſed for what they cannot help? If their capacities are too weak to comprehend the myſteries of your faith, or their conſciences too ſtubborn to obey the call of intereſt, they are to be pitied; but to en-

* A religious eſtabliſhment without a toleration of ſuch as think they cannot in conſcience conform to it, is itſelf a general tyranny, becauſe it claims abſolute authority over conſcience, and would beget particular kinds of tyranny of the worſt ſort, tyranny over the mind. Theſe are the words of biſhop Butler, and he has not ſcrupled to give it as his opinion, that even idolatry ought to be tolerated; for he ſays, if the principle of puniſhing idolatory were now admitted among the ſeveral parties of religion, the weakeſt in every place would run a great riſque of being convicted of it, or however hereſy and ſchiſm would ſoon be found crimes of the ſame nature, and equally deſerving puniſhment; and thus the ſpirit of perſecution would reign without any ſtop or controul but what ſhould ariſe from its want of power.

vy them the privilege of one moment's repoſe, to ſink them below the condition of the meaneſt rank in ſociety, to keep in force laws, which if you executed all mankind would condemn you, only for the ſake of awing and diſtreſſing them, diſcovers a cruel jealouſy and cowardice.

When all men have liberty of ſpeech, falſhood and impoſture are detected, the beſt arguments are ſucceſsful, knowledge and truth prevail, and ſociety flouriſhes.

An honeſt man ſuffers nothing by the malice of his enemies. Good government riſes ſuperior to the efforts of faction. The Chriſtian religion has gained immortal honour by the moſt ſcurrilous abuſe of unbelievers, and yet the church of England, which boaſts of being founded on the goſpel, and claims an authority which belongs only to inſpiration, ſhrinks like the ſenſitive plant at the ſlighteſt touch.

Her ſafety does not conſiſt in the purity of her doctrines, the equity of her

laws, and the learning of her guardians; but in binding and gagging her adverſaries, compelling them to acknowledge her infallibility, and applying to thoſe who do not, the convincing argument of pains and penalties; which is juſt the ſame as if I was to impriſon or aſſaſſinate an enemy, inſtead of encountering him on fair and honourable terms.

If you want to ſecure your eſtabliſhment, enforce your diſcipline, ſtrengthen your alliance with the ſtate, and exerciſe a more watchful attention to the principles of your own members; but do not claim a juriſdiction over thoſe who are not accountable to your bar, who diſclaim your authority, who wear none of your badges, and who, while they lead peaceable lives, aſk no church what they are to think, or what they are to believe, who are content with the exerciſe of their opinions, and neither ſeek to ſhare your honours nor to deſtroy them.

I am told, that the opinions of a certain nonconformiſt divine, and particu-

larly his charge againſt the church of England as guilty of idolatry *, has given umbrage to the clergy, and furniſhed one objection againſt the repeal of penal laws; this has been repreſented as the commencement of hoſtilities againſt your conſtitution, which only wants a general toleration to produce the moſt alarming conſequences; but, my lords, this accuſation, if it be falſe, may eaſily be confuted without calling in any civil power. It may be determined by reaſon and revelation, whether or no ſupreme homage and worſhip are to be paid to God the father only, and whether the liturgy addreſſes it to any other perſon; the truth or falſehood of this allegation has no connection with the queſtion, whether the diſſenters ſhall be tolerated to the utmoſt extent of reaſon and juſtice, or no? On the other hand, to be induced by reſentment againſt this, or any other, to hinder men

* See A Free Addreſs to Diſſenters as ſuch.

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from the inveſtigation of truth, inſtead of ſuppreſſing, will only encourage them.

Dr. Prieſtley is not the repreſentative of the Diſſenters ; and his opinions are far from being the ſtandard of their faith ; therefore, to ſingle out one individual as an enemy ſo formidable that nothing but pains and penalties can confute him, is paying a greater compliment to him, and a poorer one to the church, than pride or prudence ought to have ſuffered.

He has not forfeited the protection owing to a peaceable ſubject ; he has advanced only opinions, and he has ſupported them only by *reaſons*, which he leaves to his readers to receive or reject, as they appear to them convincing or otherwiſe. Here is no violence offered ; he has no recourſe to poiſoned darts ; he has no inviſible armour or tutelar deity to ſhield him ; he uſes none but fair weapons ; meet him on the open plain, confute him by argument and learning, and doubt not but you will have a fair hearing ;

hearing ; he has no act of parliament in his favour, no penalties to inflict, and no magiſtrate to keep him in countenance. The church is not ſo barren of champions, but ſome hardy veteran will ſtep forth, who ſcorning to entrench himſelf in law and power, will ſeek no other victory but that of truth *.

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* It is with pleaſure I embrace this opportunity of doing juſtice to the character of a man who deſerves well of his country. I am perſuaded, though he has been treated as an hereſiarch and an innovating reſtleſs ſectary, there is not a body of learned men in the world, except one, who would not chearfully acknowledge him for a brother and a companion.

So far from confining his views to the narrow line of polemical divinity, there is ſcarce any branch of literature, which he has not ſucceſsfully cultivated and improved.

He is one of thoſe few men who do not advance new doctrines with a view to ſurpriſe the ignorant, or to acquire a character of uncommon penetration. The inveſtigation of real and uſeful knowledge and truth is his favourite object, and the diſcovery of them his reward.

He thinks freely, and ſpeaks and writes as freely as he thinks, following no authority, a ſlave to no ſyſtem, he ranges uncontrouled by prejudice, fear, or intereſt.

It is beneath the majeſty of govern-ment to engage in ſettling religious diſ-putes,

Though he has had many difficulties and enemies to ſtruggle with, he was as ſteady in maintaining his principles when his ſubſiſtence was precarious as ſince the encouragement of the public, and the patronage of a noble lord, whoſe diſcernment of merit will not be diſputed, has made him independent. Cicero thought it his duty to ſhew the people the abſurdities of the pagan religion; and Dr. Prieſtley has reſcued Chriſtianity from thoſe groſs errors and myſterious abſurdities by which it has been long obſcured and diſgraced, and reconciled it to ſenſe and reaſon, and thoſe fixed principles in which the liberal and intelligent part of mankind muſt always agree.

It is with him an invariable maxim, that truth, happineſs, and virtue always mutually aſſiſt and ſupport each other; and that ignorance, folly, ſuperſtition, and vice are inſeparably connected together. He looks upon it as the greateſt ſoleciſm, that heaven ſhould have given us mental faculties only to be ſuppreſſed, or that any benefit can ariſe to ſociety from limiting them by ſecular laws and ordinances. He is the enemy of all pious frauds and religious errors, however dignified by authority, or rendered ſacred by antiquity, being perſuaded that mankind will be virtuous in proportion to the enlargement of their ideas and the rectitude of their judgment; therefore he is not ſollicitous, in his purſuit of truth, what prejudices he may ſhock, what ſyſtem he may overturn, or whoſe territories he may invade.

putes, which are often grounded upon metaphyſical refinements. We have had many a piteous declamation upon the miſchiefs ariſing from diverſity of opi-

invade. He may, perhaps, expreſs his mind more openly than timorous and delicate men would chuſe; but as long as there are the ſame means of defending as there are to attack, it would be an ill compliment to any doctrines of reaſon and religion, to ſuppoſe they could ſuffer by honeſty and plain dealing.

He has paid the tax of cenſure, which is generally levied upon thoſe who dare to think for themſelves; but though he has met with more inſult and abuſe than moſt men in the preſent day, I am perſuaded he would not diſarm his enemies even of the liberty of aſperſing him. While his moral character remains unimpeached, he is content with every other reproach, and he thinks the approbation of the candid and deſerving an ample recompence,--with them one genuine virtue of the heart will atone for a thouſand miſtakes of judgment. But bigots have no tenderneſs, no feeling; the want of faith is never to be redeemed; a ſcruple, a doubt fixes upon the moſt blameleſs life, irretrieveable reprobation. If the doctor has called in queſtion popular opinions without grounds, he will be the more eaſily refuted. But, let him not be ſilenced whether right or wrong; there can be no policy in reſtraining the progreſs of knowledge, unleſs it can be proved, that we have arrived at the ſummit of perfection, and that all farther improvements are to be deſpaired of.

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nions, although it is notorious and undeniable, that maſſacres, perſecution, and rebellion, and all the evils that diſgrace and ruin ſociety, have ſprung from the mad project of uniformity. Ariſtotle, Plato, Confucius, Deſcartes, Newton, never attempted to eſtabliſh their ſyſtems by force, or to require univerſal conformity, and whether their doctrines were embraced or exploded, the world was not diſturbed. The neceſſity of being unanimous, and that about mere punctilios, is an abſurdity peculiar to eccleſiaſtics; and yet, with all the attempts to promote it, it has not ſucceeded. The clergy of the church of England are not of one mind, yet their eſtabliſhment remains; and the variety of faith prevailing among the diſſenters is of no more concern to it, than what is believed in China or Japan. With reſpect to the ſtate, it is ridiculous to imagine loyalty, allegiance, and good behaviour confined to any ſet of doctrines; no opinions will

ſecure ſubmiſſion to bad government, or alienate it from that which is good. Are you, my lords, for ſtopping the free circulation of men's thoughts: to prevent debate and confuſion, you muſt have recourſe to an inquiſition: but this would introduce a confuſion infinitely greater than what you would ſuppreſs. Heaven defend us from an unanimity which muſt produce ignorance, hypocriſy, and ſtupidity!

A little conteſt is no great price to pay for truth and the privilege of expreſſing our ſentiments without controul. Controverſy on all ſubjects is the neceſſary conſequence of the exertion of thoſe faculties God has given us; and what direful miſchiefs does it produce? The diſputants grow tired, the public attention languiſhes, and all the eager clamour ſinks into oblivion; but that confuſion which your compendious deciſion would create, by erecting a general teſt, and puniſhing all gainſayers, would be a calamity of a moſt

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grievous nature, without bounds and without end.

If it be criminal to publiſh doctrines inconſiſtent with thoſe enacted by law, neither Chriſtianity nor the Reformation can be defended; and if they were ever wrong, they muſt remain ſo, for ſucceſs does not alter their nature. An eſtabliſhment implies that only a certain ſyſtem of faith ſhall be ſupported and rewarded, but not that every other ſhall be prohibited and puniſhed. Is not this a ſufficient diſtinction, without the aid of penal terrors?

The conſcientious friend of truth may bewail his misfortune; let him not have reaſon to curſe the iniquitious partiality of the law in diſtreſſing him for his integrity. You might as well fine and impriſon him for a natural as a moral defect, and make an example of him for being blind or lame, as weak and erroneous.

If I demean myſelf as an uſeful and quiet ſubject, what has the magiſtrate to do with my creed? Will it make me a better member of ſociety to be a Calviniſt, an Athanaſian, or a Semipelagian? Order and good government depend upon other conſiderations; and a wiſe ruler, like an indulgent parent, makes no cruel diſtinctions, allows the utmoſt freedom to all, and takes from them the power of abuſing it, by keeping the ſword in his own hands. He may patronize one plan of religion, and annex to it ſome privileges and immunities; but he will never obey the dictates of any party, nor devote himſelf to the gratification of their pride or their reſentment, knowing that all national eſtabliſhments are but too fond of power, too intereſted and implacable, and, inſtead of conſulting the general good, have only had the artifice and addreſs to confound the welfare of the community with their own preſervation and aggrandizement. He will introduce

good

good cuſtoms, cultivate good manners, and direct that natural ſenſe of religion, which is implanted in the human mind, towards morality and not to ſuperſtition. Above all, he will enforce the ſtricteſt laws for the maintenance of juſtice, order, and good government; and when theſe are faithfully and vigorouſly executed, peace and happineſs, due ſubjection and harmony, will invariably follow.

What merits, my lords, can you boaſt to intitle you to ſit in judgment upon conſcience, and to puniſh what you pleaſe to call hereſy? What do you think of thoſe revenues and honours which rank you with peers of the realm? Is it not ſufficient that you engroſs the lucrative advantages of religion? muſt you have an excluſive right to infallibility? muſt you monopolize both heaven and earth? muſt you bind conſcience in chains, and the free-born mind in fetters of iron? Is this for the public good? Moſt diſinte-

reſted virtue! What infinite obligations do we owe you!

But "if we are peaceable and ſilent, you will indulge us with our private opinions, provided we keep them in our own breaſts, but preaching is an *overt act*," which will breed confuſion, and a train of unſpeakable miſchiefs, which ought not to be tolerated;—unſpeakable miſchief, indeed, to—ignorance, ſuperſtition, and ſpiritual uſurpation, which flouriſh beſt in the ſilent, gloomy ſhade of implicit faith; but unſpeakable benefits and advantages to truth, knowledge, and liberty.

Tempt not the magiſtrate to forget his dignity, and to treſpaſs the bounds of his authority; he will for ever repent having following your council. There is no evil to be apprehended but from his interpoſition; let him look on calmly and unconcerned, and all the differences about opinion will inſenſibly ſicken and die;

die; frequenting the ſame communion, repeating the ſame creed, cannot unite his majeſty's ſubjects, nor can a different worſhip, or a different faith, ſeparate them in any important national point.

Agreement, caſual accidental agreement, upon metaphyſical tenets, is the moſt precarious bond of union. We are bound together, thank God, by nobler ties, by our common love to our ſovereign and to our conſtitution, we are united by our common zeal for the happineſs of our country, and the glory of our common religion, though differently underſtood and profeſſed.

Theſe are the beſt and ſafeſt bonds, and I hope they will never want the additional ſanction of a coincidence of opinions arbitrarily procured, to render them ſufficient for all the purpoſes of a great and flouriſhing community. I will engage upon the known principles of human nature, and I have the experience of this country ever ſince it has been

wife enough to let religion alone, to ſup-
port me, that an univerſal liberty to all
divines to preach what they find in ſcrip-
ture, can never ruin this or any kingdom
under heaven.

You may put a caſe which is not likely to happen, that a man under the pretence of conſcience and liberty, ſhall preach againſt the firſt principles of religion, God's moral perfections, providence, and a future retribution; and thus undermine the foundation of thoſe truths which have ever been held ſacred in the world,—colour it as ſtrong and charge it as high as you pleaſe.—

I ſhall, nevertheleſs, think there are better ways of counteracting the influence of ſuch peſtilent doctrines than by having recourſe to the ſecular arm. I would try a thouſand ſchemes before I ventured upon ſo dangerous an expedient. I would truſt to the natural ſenſe and feelings of mankind; I would oppoſe wit with wit, argument with argument, zeal with zeal;

but

but I would not do infidels the honour of perſecuting them. I would take warning from the credit which pains and penalties gave to Woolſton's nonſenſe and Annet's ſcurrility, and guard againſt ſuch fatal rocks. This, I am ſure, will be acknowledged a prudent method in general with reſpect to the minutiæ of religious worſhip; but another courſe is to be taken with relation to eſſential and fundamental doctrines.—This is the fallacy by which wiſe and good men deceive themſelves. If it had not been for this diſtinction, perſecution would not have had an exiſtence in the world. Eſſential and fundamental are big and tremendous terms; but who is to be the judge, and what is the meaning you affix to theſe words? Eſſential to ſalvation? it is kind in the magiſtrate to be concerned about that; but he may be excuſed, the goſpel has taken ſufficient care of it upon eaſier conditions. Eſſential to the being of ſociety? no; for then no ſociety could

could ſubſiſt without eſtabliſhing the ſame doctrines. Eſſential to proteſtantiſm? no; for, I apprehend, there is one common averſion to popery, among all the various perſuaſions that prevail amongſt us, as a religion which invades the natural rights of mankind, and deſtroys every ſociety but its own. You may magnify as much as you pleaſe the diſtractions ariſing from oppoſite doctrine; I defy you to produce one inſtance from hiſtory, in a civilized age, where, independent of the interference of ſecular power, they have done any material damage. Religious diſſenſions cannot continue long, but among thoſe who are inſtigated by intereſt or revenge to keep them up: when all the motives are taken away but thoſe of uſefulneſs and truth, controverſy will never be virulent or laſting.

If the magiſtrate does not throw out a bone of contention, but takes care that all parties ſhall be ſafe, and no injuſtice

ſhall

ſhall be done on account of faith, there will be nothing to enkindle paſſion or exaſperate revenge; animoſity will die of itſelf, when it has nothing but novelty and the deſire of victory to feed upon. The hierarchy would not have been overturned the laſt century, nor would it have been neceſſary to have ſhed one drop of Chriſtian blood, had there been no object of conteſt but the merits of preſbytery and epiſcopacy.

LET-

LETTER II.

MY LORDS,

I AM no bigot to a party, nor will I ever loſe my friend, or my charity, on account of any modes of faith or forms of diſcipline, which will very honeſtly admit of variety of ſentiments. But I ſhall always think it my duty to oppoſe a ſyſtem of religion, and a claſs of men who avow the principle of perſecution. Avow the principle of perſecution, I ſay; for I cannot diſtinguiſh betwixt the actual infliction of fines and impriſonment, and the retention of thoſe laws under which they operate, as a check to men's thoughts and actions. For one Chriſtian,

or one man, to talk of controlling another where he has no authority, and can ſuffer no injury, and in matters which God alone can take cognizance of, is the height of arrogance and preſumption.

I am ſure, my lords, you will join with me in lamenting the weakneſs of the fathers of the church, in having recourſe to holy artifices and pious frauds, to ſupport a religion which had its origin in the wiſdom of God; but theſe were innocent and laudable means in compariſon with oppreſſion and violence, which at once ſet aſide all the arguments for Chriſtianity drawn from miracles and propheſy, and its own excellence and purity, and commit it ſolely to the protection of an informer.

If our holy faith can ever be deſtroyed, it will be by thoſe meaſures you take in its defence; for it muſt always create a ſuſpicion, that thoſe who uſe any irrational and forcible ways of maintaining their religion, do it becauſe they can find no better

If I was to allow you all the marks of a true and orthodox church, except charity, the want of this would diſgrace them all. It matters little what eſtabliſhment prevails, if the right of judgment, on which a juſt faith can only be founded, be taken away. I would excuſe any reſemblance to popery ſooner than this black and horrible feature, ſeparate from which, all beſide is *nothing but* harmleſs folly and fanaticiſm.

Would you not, my lords, be ſorry to have it believed, that the church of England can only ſubſiſt by terror and injuſtice? Why then will you not put ſo much confidence in the excellence of your religion as to leave it to the learning and talents of its members? Shew ſo much courage as to think yourſelves ſafe, though all mankind are free; there is dignity and honour in the experiment, and whatever be the conſequence you will never repent adopting principles ſo generous in themſelves, and ſo worthy

of

of Chriſtianity. You cannot act otherwiſe, if you follow the rules and maxims of the goſpel, and are willing to preſerve any reſemblance to the ſpirit and genius of its divine author. On the other hand, if you are ſollicitous only to maintain the outward form of a Chriſtian church, and to ſtand upon the ground of a political conſtitution, you are ſufficiently ſecure againſt the united attacks of all your enemies; your caution and fears are all ſuperfluous, whatever becomes of Chriſtianity you are ſafe. If your doctrines were infinitely more abſurd than your moſt implacable enemies believe them to be; in the midſt of thoſe entrenchments by which you are fortified, you may ſet them all at defiance; for the hiſtory of the world cannot furniſh one inſtance of the worſt ſyſtem of religion wanting friends and advocates, with ſo many emoluments to recompence them.

We tax not the ſtate we live under with unkindneſs; we hold in the higheſt eſteem

eſteem the generoſity and candour of our rulers; but we muſt feel ſome regret, poſſibly ſome reſentment, when the profeſſed miniſters and guardians of the law of liberty, officiouſly intercept the intentions of the legiſlature, and enter into a combination as warm and vigorous as if the church was in the laſt agonies of deſpair.

You are terrified, my lords, with a ſpectre, and in your fright ſay and do ſuch things, as in your waking moments you can neither juſtify nor approve.

I hope this is not the moſt judicious zeal you can expreſs. If this be the beſt proof of your affection, I am ſure neither Chriſtianity in general, nor epiſcopacy in particular, owe you any thanks; your friends will lament your indiſcretion, your enemies will have their revenge in your raſhneſs, and poſterity will bluſh for your intolerance.

I now

I now proceed to conſider a few more reaſons which had their weight in the late confirmation of penal laws. " The time in which we moved for relief was deemed improper." This ſtale and ſhallow reaſon, which would keep all improvement at a ſtand, has been aſſigned by men who allowed not only the juſtice of relieving proteſtant diſſenters, but who aſſerted the right of all mankind to religious liberty without diſtinction.

Was there ever a convenient ſeaſon for making amendments in a corrupt church or ſtate? If the well-timing prudence of ſtateſman and prieſts had always been conſulted, we ſhould neither have had liberty nor religion at the preſent day; we ſhould not have been proteſtants; perhaps we might have been idolaters. It was not ſure *too ſoon* to diſclaim the horrid principle of diſtreſſing men for their virtue, their integrity, their religion. Chriſtianity, after ſo many ages, had given ſufficient time to determine

whether it might not ſafely be tolerated without limitation or reſtraint, and the honour of ſetting an example to the world in behalf of religious liberty, by giving it not merely a precarious connivance, but a certain invariable legal ſecurity, might have pleaded for the propriety of the preſent time. But it happened unfortunately, that the clergy had but juſt moved to be releaſed from their ſubſcription to the articles, and a compliance with one requeſt might lead to a compliance with the other. It is therefore repreſented as an attempt inconſiſtent with candour and prudence, an ungrateful return for your paſt lenity; an inſidious plot laid to compel you to declare for liberty or perſecution, and as coming behind you when you were grappling with a powerful enemy in your own territories. Now, my lords, notwithſtanding ſome diſtinction might be made between the petition of your own members and ours, I moſt devoutly wiſh them

them not to be diſtinguiſhed: I hope in time they will both ſucceed; and though a certain divine has condemned our interfering in your differences, as a kind of continental connection with which we have no buſineſs, I ſhall not ſcruple to expreſs my warmeſt veneration for the character, conduct, and writings of the aſſociated clergy; they may not be ſo numerous, as from the freedom of the age might be expected, but they have every merit beſide to intitle them to the conſideration of the ſtate. It is totally foreign to the idea of a Chriſtian church to require any thing but a Chriſtian faith, and nothing but reſolving all religion into the will and caprice of the magiſtrate can ſet aſide their claim. I would give up thirty-nine thouſand metaphyſical articles before I would exclude one honeſt and worthy man. I pity a church which ſtands upon the ruins of conſcience, and of whoſe preferments a Chambers cannot partake. It is of little moment what

opinion I entertain of ſuch a character, but I cannot help expreſſing my warmeſt pleaſure in ſeeing ſo ſingular an act of diſintereſtedneſs in this unprincipled age; and, I muſt beg leave to ſay, that it is more than recompenced by the united applauſe of all upright and impartial men.

But the clergy at the Feathers have not employed the diſſenters to fight their battles, nor is there any plan concerted between them. Our application was dictated by no political views, but was the reſult of a full conviction of our right and our deſerts, upon the principles of conſcience, policy, and Chriſtianity; and it has been approved, I will venture to ſay, by the general ſenſe of all ranks of people. Indeed no perſon can diſapprove of it, who is a real and conſiſtent friend of revelation; for it is, properly ſpeaking, nothing but a propoſal for the toleration of genuine Chriſtianity, ſeparate from all human commentaries and definitions.

Several intimations were thrown out by different ranks of men, that if the diſſenters choſe any farther extent of religious liberty, it could not be refuſed them at this period. It appeared ſhocking to them that ſtatutes ſo ſcandalous to a proteſtant government, by which numbers of men of a liberal education, and unblemiſhed characters, were expoſed to the heavieſt penalies, ſhould ſtill be upon record to reproach the pretences of this boaſted land of liberty. Many among the clergy acceded to the reaſonableneſs of our requeſt, who were averſe to the leaſt alteration in their own conſtitution.

Under theſe circumſtances, what an abject ſpirit muſt the diſſenters have ſhewn not to have embraced ſo favourable a ſeaſon? What cauſe had they to expect an oppoſition from your lordſhips, who of all men ought to be the moſt tender of the rights of human nature.

The adminiſtration did not object to our requeſt, and it has twice paſſed the commons with a greater ſuperiority of argument and conviction than any other bill can boaſt. The moſt independent character, the moſt conſummate abilities and acccompliſhments, the moſt oppoſite parties united in the cauſe of liberty. Why need I mention the names of Savile, Dyſon, Montague, Meredith, Townſhend, Harris, in one houſe, or thoſe of Richmond, Shelburne, Manſfield, Lyttelton, and Camden, in the other, who have done themſelves immortal honour. Philoſophers and Chriſtians in all ages ſhall remember the honourable teſtimony they have paid to liberty and truth. I rejoice that the diſſenters have gone ſo far, if they advance no farther; for as long as there is any regard due to the authority of wiſdom and virtue, they muſt from this time date their protection as a real, and not an imaginary thing, in ſpite of the exiſtence

of the ſtatutes they complain of; the ſenſe of mankind is their ſecurity, the conviction of their juſtice is their ſafeguard; and reaſon and humanity repeal thoſe laws which only biſhops confirm.

The defence which truth and reaſon have made againſt bigotry, ignorance, and ſuperſtition, is ours. The ſhew of a triumph, the name of a victory, is yours.

Victrix cauſa diis placuit ſed victa Catoni.

You may diſappoint us of that ſecurity we aſk for, but you cannot take from us the conſciouſneſs of deſerving it; you cannot confute the equity of our claim, but you can vote againſt it; you cannot point out any evil effects that would ariſe from a more liberal toleration, but you can ſay with Felix, Go your way for this time, when we have a more convenient ſeaſon we will call for you. But, my lords, ſome hints have been dropped concerning a ſcheme in agitation to unite

his majeſty's ſubjects in intereſt and affection, touching eccleſiaſtical matters, to which our bill would be an obſtacle. Now, though it may have been mentioned in converſation, and aſſerted in pamphlets, that ſome amendment of the Articles was upon the carpet, yet no competent authority has been produced for it, and the diſſenters had no intimations given them, to induce them to ſuſpend their application on any ſuch account. What objection can this be to the removal of pains and penalties? and why ſhould our propoſal diſcourage your deſign? One laudable act of moderation does not interfere with another. Was it not a proper introduction to a reformation in your church, to grant liberty of conſcience to all proteſtants?

If your motive was to bring over the diſſenters, they are obliged to you; but they are not willing to purchaſe any favour at the expence of their principles or their duty; and whether they were likely

likely to be reconciled or not, it was certainly incumbent on you to remove every obſtacle to the admiſſion of honeſt and conſcientious men into your own communion. The diſcovery of truth, and the culture of pure unadulterated Chriſtianity, ought to be the firſt objects among all Chriſtians; and whatever claſhes with theſe, is an abuſe of the moſt enormous kind. If theſe are ſecured, it matters little what adventitious circumſtances are given up or retained.

If you will remove every real ground of ſeparation, we are ready to meet you with a correſpondent candour and good will; but God forbid we ſhould make any diſhonourable conceſſions, inconſiſtent with the regard due to the ſupremacy of Chriſt, we will chearfully conſpire with you againſt the common enemies of our religion; but we muſt ſtand upon our own proper ground, and aſſert thoſe immortal principles to which a proteſtant diſſent and the Reformation itſelf owed

their

their birth. Some miniſters may be ſatisfied with relaxing a few of your ceremonies; but the fundamental objection will remain as long as you exerciſe the power of impoſing any faith beſides that of the Holy Scriptures. You may render your yoke eaſier by ſoothing palliatives; but nothing leſs than full permiſſion to be tried by the Goſpel will ſatisfy thoſe who underſtand the liberty wherewith Chriſt has made them free.

The only way to unite all parties in intereſt and affection is to break down the partitions of ſtrife and animoſity, and to deſtroy thoſe cruel diſtinctions, which can have no tendency but to inſpire one ſet of men with ſupercilious arrogance, and the other with indignation or deſpair.

My lords, I am afraid you objected to our propoſal, not becauſe it hindered you from ſetting about an alteration now univerſally deemed neceſſary, but becauſe it added freſh reaſons and obligations to your making the attempt without delay.

If you meant to correct a few punctilios, that you might with a better grace enforce your abſolute right of deciding in matters of faith, and then complain that the diſſenters interrupted you by aſſerting the great proteſtant principle of being accountable only to the word of God, I am heartily glad of the obſtruction you met with; for every error and blemiſh in religion is trivial in compariſon with an uncontrolled deſpotiſm over judgment and conſcience.

I cannot paſs over one circumſtance, which has been ſtrongly urged as an argument againſt any indulgence towards the diſſenters; I mean their oppoſing the ſettlement of biſhops in America. This point has been ſo well conſidered in a public paper, that it is almoſt needleſs to ſay any thing about it; but as I do not mean to advance any falſhood, or to conceal any truth, I ſhall acknowledge, that ſome gentlemen did, at the requeſt of the colonies, conſult adminiſtration about the

the rumour of biſhops being ſettled in America, aud the intention was diſclaimed in the ſtrongeſt terms.

What were the motives that induced government to diſcourage this favourite project I do not pretend to ſay; they were not of a religious nature, and could not be attributed to any influence of ours. It might be imagined, that the neceſſity of receiving ordination here would tend to increaſe that connection and dependence, which it is the policy of Great Britain to cultivate. However, if we had taken the moſt active part againſt this meaſure, it would not have failed on that account; but we are not chargeable with any interpoſition inconſiſtent with religious liberty or the nature of our preſent application. I do not know one diſſenter who oppoſed the inſtitution of biſhops as ſpiritual men, for the purpoſes of ordination, confirmation, and other ſpiritual offices. If you contend for any thing more, we cannot help declaring a ſincere

but

but generous oppoſition. An order of prieſts of ſuch high dignity, ſuch diſproportioned revenues, with ſo much political influence, and ſo many lucrative benefices at their diſpoſal, is ſo vaſt an addition to the executive power with which they are always connected, ſo burdenſome to the community, ſo foreign to the ſimplicity of the goſpel and the idea of a primitive epiſcopacy, that if their exiſtence depended upon the conſent of wiſe and impartial men, they would find it difficult to gain an eſtabliſhment in any country upon earth. In Great Britain, they can plead a long preſcription, they make a part of the conſtitution, and are exceedingly uſeful to any adminiſtration; and while they anſwer the end of their creation, I hope no rude ſchiſmatic will ever diſturb their peaceful ſlumbers.

But if they ſhall pretend to monopolize truth, to ſtamp and licence what doctrines are to be believed and preached, as if they were the ſole patentees of reli-

gion, I ſhall beg leave to diſpute their title and apoſtolical authority. I will go on without ſcruple to advance and defend ſuch doctrines as I believe to be the dictates of ſenſe and reaſon; I ſhall always think I cannot better approve my zeal for Chriſtianity, than by lopping off thoſe abſurdities, which have been grafted upon it with a view to embelliſh it, without being awed by the decrees of ſynods or councils. As a man, I will refuſe no obedience which I owe to the community; as a Chriſtian, I will give up no right which a Chriſtian has a claim to. While the ſtate gives me leave to exerciſe my function, I will ſhew my ſenſe of its indulgence, by inculcating ſentiments conducive to loyalty, public virtue, and peace. If, in compliance with your reſentment and prejudices, it ſhall ſtill be prevailed upon to keep perſecution in ſuſpence, I will never ſeek my revenge in one uncharitable wiſh towards your religion; but I ſhall rejoice that heaven

has

has reſerved one choſen ſpot upon the habitable globe ſecure from your arbitrary influence.

There, in the abſence of epiſcopal controul, variety of opinions prevail without confuſion, and the worſhippers of one God can harmoniouſly join their different forms without diſcord or rancour. Free and happy abodes! may no excluſive eſtabliſhments diſturb your peace! may no bold uſurper invade your rights! may no favourite form of religion inſult over the reſt! Let not ambition or worldly power corrupt your religion, or interrupt that equal freedom from which you derive ſuch ineſtimable advantages!

If the conſideration of the tyranny from which you fled, and the cruel reſtraints by which conſcience is ſtill limited, does but awaken you to preſerve Chriſtianity free from every profane violation, and to keep the balance of univerſal liberty in religion, you will have reaſon to bleſs a Stuart race, and our indignities and hard-

ſhips

ſhips will not be without ſome alleviation. Perhaps you may profit by the event; for, I hope, my lords, you will learn to deteſt thoſe inhuman principles of perſecution, which are not only the ſcandal and ruin of ſociety, but deſtructive to thoſe who abet and employ them, ſince your influence now ſuffers in conſequence of thoſe meaſures you took to eſtabliſh it, and America, peopled by your rage, is inflexible to your entreaties, and opens its hoſpitable arms to every ſtranger but yourſelves.

In whatever light I behold your late oppoſition, it appears to me weak, indiſcreet, and ungenerous; it adds neither to the ſtrength nor credit of your church; it was loſing an opportunity of acquiring real honour without any real ſacrifice; it diſcovers a narrow contracted idea of policy, religion, and human nature. If it was the effect of bigotry and prejudice, you are inexcuſable, as legiſlators, in being actuated by ſuch baſe motives. If it was

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owing to reſentment that you puniſhed the ſins of the fathers upon the children, it was utterly unworthy of the embaſſadors of Chriſt. If you thought to accompliſh uniformity of faith, it was abſurd and ridiculous. You have taken one important ſtep without conſidering the next; and, by ſo doing, have expoſed yourſelves to the miſerable alternative of being hated or deſpiſed. If you execute the laws, you will bring upon yourſelves eternal odium; if you let them ſleep, you proclaim their impropriety and injuſtice. If you mean to promote an univerſal conformity to the articles, you muſt not only ſtop the mouths of all the nonſubſcribing diſſenters, but you muſt lay a reſtraint upon the preſs; you muſt prohibit the intercourſes of converſation, and lay an embargo upon the exerciſe of men's rational faculties. What an arduous taſk have you undertaken! Yet all this might have been avoided, without riſking one ſingle advantage, had

you poſſeſſed generoſity enough to have complied with the diſſenters' requeſt. When I conſider your critical and diſtreſſed ſituation; in poſſeſſion of an obnoxious power which you dare neither exert nor relinquiſh, attacked by the enthuſiaſt and the freethinker, importuned by your own diſſatiſied members, and perplexed by the diſcontents of the laity; if you have any regard for religion and the intereſts of your country, my lords, I pity you; if you are attentive only to your own eaſe, ambition, and ſecurity, my pity gives way to indignation and contempt.

I beg your lordſhips candid ſentiments, reſpecting the future conduct of the diſſenters. How ſhall they act, ſo as not to offend the ſtate or their own conſciences? How ſhall they preſerve both the deference which is due to your lordſhips' deciſion, and that which they owe to their Maſter in heaven? If they deſiſt, they give up their claim; if they perſevere, and you continue to refuſe, they

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be the innocent cauſes of your ſuſtaining additional diſhonour.

You have put a negative upon the lawful exerciſe of our religion; but you cannot make the world believe that religion itſelf depends upon, or is connected with, the will of the magiſtrate. You have limited the freedom of the goſpel; but you have not deſtroyed Chriſtianity. Do you expect we ſhould comply with your requiſitions, or reſign our profeſſions? Cruel dilemma! But ſuppoſing we were extirpated, other diſſenters would riſe up; rational creatures will always remain to aſſert the rights of judgment and conſcience; and ſhall they worſhip no God, and believe no creed but yours? The nature of things is not altered by your determination; and right and wrong are not to be decided by vote. Edicts and proſcriptions were iſſued out againſt the goſpel, and yet it continues the ſame yeſterday, to-day, and for ever. Laws have been framed againſt philoſophy and

ſcience, and liberty and virtue, but they have not loſt their reputation in the world. You may inſtitute what opinions and articles you pleaſe, and enforce them by the heavieſt penalties; but if they cannot ſtand the teſt of reaſon, they will fall only the ſooner for your attempts to ſupport them.

Truth, immortal truth, keeps on her ſteady and glorious career, and advances to that perfection, which, in ſpite of your impotent efforts, ſhe will one day attain. We ſhould be unworthy of the name we profeſs, if we were awed into ſilence by the threats of puniſhment, which, be it ever ſo great, the approbation of heaven and the teſtimony of a good conſcience will abundantly compenſate. If you aſk by what authority we propagate our doctrines? I anſwer, by the ſame which was pleaded by the firſt Chriſtians, by the reformers, and which operates upon every honeſt man; to reſiſt impoſture, however ancient and ve-

venerable, and to defend truth, however forſaken and unpopular.

You may take all the advantages you pleaſe of your majority, your public faſhion, and your power in parliament; you may avail yourſelves of the prejudices excited againſt us, and propagated from age to age; you may excel us in grandeur and antiquity; we will conteſt with you the qualifications of good citizens and honeſt men. You may boaſt of the improvements you have made upon the original plan of Chriſtianity; we are content with it, unadorned as it is, and hope only for its future rewards. You may repreſent us as diſaffected to the throne; we appeal to the intereſt we have at ſtake, and to our paſt conduct, in confutation of this ridiculous charge. You may brand us as deiſts, becauſe we diſpute your authority to ſettle all controverſies. If to be deprived of the common ſecurity of ſubjects, and yet to live peaceably and contribute all in our power to the ſecurity

of the ſtate, be the mark of bad ſubjects, we deſerve that appellation. If to diſtinguiſh betwixt Chriſtianity and its corruptions, to preach and live under the warrant of ſcripture, and to inculcate ſound morals, on the proſpect of that immortality which was brought to light by the goſpel, be a ſign of deiſm, we have no objection to the name of deiſts.

But the frequent uſe of theſe invidious aſperſions will take out their ſting. The world is not ſo ready as it has been to follow the cry of a few deſigning men; the growth of hereſy and the danger of the church have loſt their dreadful ſound; the worſt Hereſies that ever infeſted religion are at laſt found to be pride, ambition, the luſt of gain, and the ſpirit of perſecution.

Amidſt your tender ſorrows and anxious ſolicitude for the fate of your church, ſpare ſome ſighs, ſhed ſome tears for Chriſtianity itſelf, which, in this age, deſerves your commiſeration, wounded as

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it is, and bleeding before you, while the Levite only looks upon it, and the prieſt paſſes by on the other ſide.

Remember you had once an eſtabliſhment more formidable than your own to contend with. The time has been, when you were glad to engage, like us, with the weapons of reaſon and argument, to commend your cauſe to heaven, and to appeal to the Bible as your only friend, againſt a religion armed with all the thunder of the ſtate.

Conſider, if the plea we urge has no weight in it, you would never have had the power to make penal laws, or to keep them in perpetual terror. You were once heretics as well as we. Your anceſtors atteſted their zeal for genuine Chriſtianity at the ſtake. Well had their lives been ſpared, if they were only the means of erecting another ſpiritual dominion as arbitrary as that which they overturned.

The Scriptures they had recourſe to, as comprehending all their faith, are now

conſidered as an ambiguous proof of orthodoxy, and diſtruſted as too feeble ſecurity for religion and government; they muſt now be read with caution and reſerve, a thouſand dangers lurk beneath, and they may betray us into I know not what fatal errors. Who would think their Chriſtianity and yours were the ſame? Upon what different grounds has the religion of this country been defended?

To bar yourſelves againſt any future conviction by a glorious reſolution never to believe any thing againſt law, is ſomething ſingular; but to pretend to hold all the proteſtants in this kingdom in the ſame chains, to forbid the light of truth to ſhine, becauſe you will not ſee it yourſelves, is the moſt extraordinary exertion of folly that can be conceived.

How much better would you have conſulted reputation by allowing a liberty you cannot take away! how much more durably would you have fixed your throne

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by an act of well-timed generosity! with how much better a grace could you have treated with your own disaffected brethren, and removed every cause of separation and discontent!

You might have stifled our complaints, and put it out of our power to make any fresh demands; as the dissenters multiplied under oppression, they have diminished by indulgence, and you would have seen them melt away under the beams of your mercy, while your intolerance only strengthens and unites them.

At this time of day, my lords, when a spirit of dissipation ranges through all classes of men, when corruption is openly avowed, when public spirit and private virtue are daily losing ground; to what shall we have recourse for our reformation but the influence of religion? But when the maxims of Christianity and the church are at variance; when subscription to unintelligible doctrines is the

term of admiſſion to our ſeminaries of inſtruction; when the firſt ſtep to holy orders is a refinement upon the common rules of honeſty; when the degree of faith and zeal, for it is only in proportion to the preſent advantages it procures; when the Chriſtian religion itſelf is not legally tolerated, but under certain limitations inconſiſtent with its genius and ſpirit; what can be expected but a general increaſe of ſuperſtition and infidelity? Is it to be wondered at that your places of worſhip ſhould be deſerted, your miniſters diſeſteemed, and your influence over public manners at an end? Will it not be imagined, that ſuperior ſanctity and piety are a mere pretence; and that power, intereſt, and ambition, are the foundation of your extraordinary zeal and unanimity? When theſe ſuſpicions are entertained, it will not be ſufficient that you have the ſanction of the law and the protection of the magiſtrate. The appearance of honour and juſtice, and the

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veneration of the public, are the moſt laſting ſecurities of any conſtitution; and when theſe are gone, your immunities will neither be held in peace, nor enjoyed with comfort. I appeal to the ſenſe of all mankind, whether there can be a greater miſtake than that of annexing the idea of guilt to religious opinions, which depend not upon our will, but upon our judgment, and therefore are, and muſt be innocent. An honeſt and virtuous diſpoſition is not confined to any denomination or party; every faith that is accompanied with the fear of God and the love of righteouſneſs will be accepted. Man would be of all creatures the moſt wretched, if, endued with a power of reflection and conſcience, he was debarred from following their dictates. If we muſt hold our convictions at the diſcretion of another, we may juſtly envy the ſtupidity of the brutes. If it be criminal to declare what we believe to be true; if human laws could ſuperſede the

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obligations of honeſty, ſociety would only be eſtabliſhed villainy. I would ſooner ſee all the forms of government in the world periſh, than conſent to ſo deteſtable a maxim. What I believe to be truth, I am authoriſed, I am commanded by the God of Heaven to maintain, in oppoſition to every human authority. Indeed I cannot do otherwiſe, without allowing that the ordinances of the magiſtrate are the foundation of right and wrong, and that all actions are in themſelves indifferent till their nature is aſcertained by poſitive appointment. Do you profeſs, my lords, to be members of a church which adopts ſuch principles as theſe; whoſe exiſtence depends upon the annihilation of the rights of human nature, upon denouncing anathemas, keeping up fines and terrors, rewarding duplicity and prevarication, and puniſhing honeſty and virtue?

We covet no ſuch honour; we envy you no privileges which depend on ſuch terms;

terms; we abhor and diſclaim the cruel prerogative of perſecution for conſcience ſake; we reſign to you without regret all that this world can beſtow; we aſk only an indemnity to our properties and perſons; and, in return for it, we offer all that government can require from dutiful ſubjects, and more than was thought neceſſary in the reign of Charles the Second; we reverence the conſtitution, and are willing to hazard our ſubſtance and lives in its defence. Our obedience is not the effect of conſtraint, the purchaſe of large gratuities, or the extorted tribute of fear: we aſk no independent revenues, no unalienable endowments. The friends on whoſe generoſity we ſubſiſt are as forward in every act of bounty to the eſtabliſhed church as any of its own members; permit them to dedicate part of their munificence to the cauſe of truth and liberty, and to the ſupport of thoſe whom they believe to be honeſt and ſincere. We boaſt of being the beſt friends

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to the houſe of Hanover, and it is our ambition to be diſintereſted in our allegiance. We have not one act of ingratitude to ſtain our public character, though we owe nothing to the ſtate but the air we breathe, and the ſun which ſhines as impartially upon a diſſenter as a churchman. This is all we have to offer for the favour we ſollicit, unleſs I may add, that we will be the ſame whether it is granted or no.

But why ſhould we be ſollicitous about any temporal ſecurities and privileges, when we recollect what has been the fate of our religion in all ages; of what moment is our diſgrace and oppreſſion, when compared with the circumſtances of thoſe who thought it not too much to be accurſed for Chriſt's ſake and the goſpel? or what compariſon will our difficulties bear to the ſufferings of the firſt profeſſors of Chriſtianity? It is but looking a little forward, and all penalties ſhall ceaſe, and all fines ſhall be paid;

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we ſhall be releaſed from every inquiſition, and pay homage only to one judge. It is an article in our faith, though not one of the Thirty-nine, that both you and we ſhall one day give an account of our ſtewardſhip: and if there be any truth in the ſacred writings; if there be any merit or praiſe in ſtudying and conforming our faith and practice to them; if there be any ſhame in leſſening their authority; you are the perſons deſerving of compaſſion, and not we: and when the proceedings of human judicature are re-examined, you may perhaps find your own defeat the greateſt.

But it is not too late, my lords, to retrieve your character as guardians of the Chriſtian faith; and, as a proof of my friendſhip, I will tell you how it may be done. Diſavow all your paſt meaſures; acknowledge that your late oppoſition ſprung from ignorance, imprudence, and a miſtaken zeal for your conſtitution. Give the diſſenters all they

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aſk without delay, leſt the reproaches of the world compel you to do it with a worſe grace hereafter. Do not confound your principles with thoſe of the ſtate, nor your cauſe with that of Chriſtianity, for fear they ſhould diſown your alliance. Aſk pardon of Heaven for calling its inſpired goſpel to be tried by the criterion of your Articles; and for deeming thoſe unworthy of the common benefits of ſociety, who are not excluded from the communion of ſaints and angels. Embrace with cordial affection the diſſenters as branches of the ſame family, and friends of the ſame religion, however differently underſtood. Remember, that if they are miſtaken, it is their loſs, not yours. Pity their ſcruples, if you pleaſe, but do not cenſure and condemn them. Shew them ſome reſpect for their ſervices in defence of a religion, with which you ſtill profeſs to hold ſome connection. When you have advanced ſo far, proceed to remove thoſe blemiſhes

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in your own church, which ſome of your brighteſt ornaments have excepted to as furniſhing matter of triumph to the infidel, and encouragement to enthuſiaſm and fanaticiſm. Baniſh thoſe teſts which in your candid moments you muſt allow to be a bar to none but conſcientious minds. Let all the parts of your liturgy which relate to the peculiars of Chriſtianity be expreſſed in ſcripture language, as that which infinite wiſdom approved, and human ſkill cannot amend. Provide a better ſecurity for your hierarchy than oaths and ſubſcriptions, by making it the intereſt of all good men to ſupport it. Let the diſcipline of your church be its ſecurity. Let your immunities be protected by law; but let your religion be eſtabliſhed in truth, and do not have recourſe to thoſe artifices and compulſory methods, which would defend impoſture and impiety itſelf.

When you have done all this, you will have no adverſaries but thoſe of reaſon

and common ſenſe. Diſtraction will ceaſe, and animoſity and ſchiſm be known no more. None will ſeparate from you but thoſe whoſe weakneſs and petulance are to be pitied, and their ſeparation will be the greateſt puniſhment you will ever think of inflicting.

Every liberal heart will be united, every upright hand will be lifted up in your defence; your dominion being founded in truth, and not in tyranny, will be obeyed out of eſteem and conviction, and not out of fear.

Thus, my lords, I have expreſſed my ſentiments without fear or reſerve; and, I flatter myſelf, I have weakened the force of ſome objections againſt the diſſenters' bill. If they prove inſtrumental in procuring it a more favourable reception hereafter, I ſhall be thankful: I hope at leaſt they will tend to ſet the opinions of men who are juſtly aggrieved, in ſuch a light as ſhall make the attempt to perſecute them more ſhameful and odious.

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If you want to ſee this ſubject more fully diſcuſſed, I beg leave to recommend to your lordſhips' peruſal, the pamphlets of Doctors Kippis and Furneaux, and Mr. Mauduit, which are ſo excellent and convincing, that if we were indebted to our late application only for theſe productions, we ſhould have had no reaſon to repent having made it. I am not conſcious of ſhewing any want of deference to your lordſhips' character and rank; but if you think otherwiſe, I hope you will impute it to my ſuperior regard to truth and Chriſtian liberty.

I have not written this in concert with, or under the direction of any ſet of miniſters, and they are not chargeable with any blame incurred by the manner or matter of this addreſs. I cannot tell what methods of redreſs are in agitation, nor what ſucceſs they will meet with from the legiſlature, but I hope they will never deſiſt proſecuting their juſt

right, till the ſtate either proclaims them free, or ſeals their lips in everlaſting ſilence; one of theſe two alternatives muſt prevail, and till then, my lords, be aſſured this generation ſhall not paſs away without being witneſs of their unwearied endeavours to vindicate the liberty wherewith nature and Chriſtianity have made them free: they will temperately, but ſteadily purſue every meaſure which the Engliſh conſtitution permits to all its ſubjects for the recovery of their privileges; they will ſtill continue to defend ſuch principles as they believe to be agreeable to truth, ſcripture, and reaſon, without aſking whether they are tolerated by foreign churches or eſtabliſhed by your own, for we hold theſe propoſitions indiſpenſably ſacred,—that magiſtracy has no right to take cognizance of ſentiments and opinions, till they have produced criminal overt acts, evidently injurious to ſociety:—that a power of judging what doctrines are tolerable,

lerable, belongs to no human creature; and, if granted, would juſtify all the perſecutions in the world:—that no church has a right, either from the ſtate, or the ſcriptures, to preſcribe articles of faith to another:—that inſpiration only, and divine authority are entitled to implicit ſubmiſſion:—that the tenets of all ſectaries in this country may be ſafely indulged in their utmoſt extent, without the leaſt prejudice to the community:—that the ſcriptures contain every thing neceſſary to ſalvation, and that a belief of them, and obligation to preach according to their ſtandard, is a better ſecurity for true religion, and every good end that can be anſwered by public preaching, than the articles of the church of England, or any other yet made the teſt of church communion:—that an uniformity of faith is impoſſible;—and, if poſſible, unneceſſary:—that the uſurpation of a power over conſcience is the grand cha-

racteriſtic of the church of Rome, and that the retention of it is a retention of the worſt part of popery.—Theſe are our ſentiments,—and if you grant us theſe, we are bound to you in intereſt and affection, and we ſhall chearfully co-operate with you in every laudable deſign to promote the happineſs of our country, and the honour of our religion.

And now, my lords, to conclude this letter, if you uſe your victory like generous conquerors, and inſtead of purſuing your advantage, do all in your power to ſoften and mitigate it;—if you pity the difficulties we labour under, inſtead of triumphing over us, and ſhew a diſpoſition to relieve us effectually at a more favourable opportunity;—if you have only denied our requeſt for the ſake of having the ſubject of our claim more fully diſcuſſed, or aſcertaining the ſentiments of the whole body of diſſenters, or with a view to a more perfect and comprehenſive ſcheme of your own;—if you think

yourſelves intitled to the honour of granting a more extenſive indulgence, as having firſt paſſed the bill for toleration;—if you regard our ſeparation as a matter of conſcience, and not a principle of religious faction, and are deſirous to indulge us as far as you can, conſiſtent with the preſervation of your own church;—if you treat us as friends and brethren, as fellow proteſtants and fellow Chriſtians, engaged with you under the ſame banner againſt the common enemies of morality and religion;—if you do us the juſtice to believe, that we are animated by no motives but the love of truth, a regard to the honour of our religion, and a candid zeal for our natural and Chriſtian rights;—if you think any encouragement due to us for ſo long and patient a reſignation, to unmerited hardſhip for our loyalty, obedience, and affection to government;—if you acquit us of all ſuſpicions of invading your privileges, and repoſe an honourable confidence in us, that we will never

never bring toleration into diſcredit by our abuſe of it;—if you ceaſe to aſperſe us as reſtleſs fanatics, or as enemies to revelation, or as deſigning men, who ſeek for a greater latitude from diſhoneſt views;—if you diſavow that unchriſtian principle of impoſing creeds and articles, and have recourſe to methods for ſecuring your eſtabliſhment more lenient, more reaſonable, more agreeable to Chriſtian liberty;—you will then be worthy of the title of a Chriſtian church,—your power will excite no malice,—your immunities no envy,—your diſintereſtedneſs, generoſity, and candour will give you an eſtabliſhment infinitely greater and better than you can derive from the ſecular arm; in a word, you will ſet an example of lenity and liberty worthy of the imitation of all Chriſtendom.

On the other hand, if elated by your ſucceſs, and preſuming upon the approbation of the whole kingdom, you aſpire to more vigorous meaſures, and think we are

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to be ſubdued by wholeſome ſeverities; if you think this a proper period for the revival of eccleſiaſtical dominion; if, inſtead of having recourſe to learning, exemplary piety, and the faithful diſcharge of your duty, as your beſt ſecurity, you truſt ſolely to your intereſt in parliament, and your firm connection with the ſtate; if too wiſe to enforce perſecution, you are not wiſe enough to decline all menaces; if you are reſolved to maintain the power of tormenting without neceſſity and without reaſon, and to keep alive cruel laws, in hopes this kingdom will one day be ignorant and ſuperſtitious enough to ſubmit to them; if, not content with your revenues, honours, and independency, you are for ſetting up an abſolute ſovereignty over conſcience, granting and reſuming opinions at your own arbitrary pleaſure, deciding, condemning, and puniſhing, without appeal and without redreſs, diſclaiming all argument but force, and ruling by the compendious method

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of fines and penalties ; if, without entering into the merits of our cauſe, you think it ſufficient to brand us with odious names, which can only ſerve to expoſe us to the inſult of ignorant and furious men ; if you conjure up the danger of the church, and the confuſion of the laſt century, in order to excite commiſeration for yourſelves, and reſentment againſt us ; if you foment party diviſions, by repreſenting us as a fanatical people, who are never to be ſatisfied, though we have no ſecurity for our perſons and poſſeſſions for a moment, and as breathing vengeance againſt your hierarchy, tho' we are ready to give you every aſſurance you can aſk on this head ; if you have recourſe to the moſt glaring inconſiſtencies to injure our reputation, ſometimes treating us as enthuſiaſts and methodiſts, who pretend to inſpiration, and ſometimes as profane ſceptics, who, under pretence of exalting human reaſon, diſcredit revelation, and want to throw open the door to all kind of licentiouſneſs ;

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ſometimes as rivals, who grudge your emoluments, and are impatient to divide your patrimony ; ſometimes as a peeviſh captious people, whom no condeſcenſion can mollify, and who reject all your overtures to reconcilation ; in ſhort, if either policy, fear, or bigotry make you enemies to all amendment and toleration; if you are determined to rivet your own chains and ours, and to continue every thing in the ſame ſtate in which it has ſo long defied all the attempts of learning and knowledge ; you will be univerſally regarded as having an intereſt ſeparate from truth and reaſon, hurtful to your country, and inconſiſtent with the intereſts of mankind ; a body of learned men, yet enemies to all knowledge; a ſociety of Chriſtians, yet averſe to the only principles upon which Chriſtianity can flouriſh ; a community profeſſing independency of the world, yet mercenary, avaricious, and ſelfiſh ; your preaching will loſe its dignity, your prayers their efficacy, your

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pretenſions to ſanctity will deceive no longer, your votaries will only be thoſe of ſuperſtition and ignorance, while the philoſopher and the Chriſtian will deſpiſe all your artifices. The ſtate will meaſure your merit by your proſtitution, and patronize you no longer than you diſgrace your profeſſion. In ſhort, you will degenerate into a ſpiritual faction, endowed with a power miſchievous to others, and in the end ruinous to yourſelves: you may be dreaded, you may be envied, you may receive the homage of credulity and ignorance, but you will never be eſteemed nor loved. When this is the caſe, your members will only conſiſt of perſons of the meaneſt ſpirit and worſt principle. In a word, you will multiply your real enemies, while you gain no real friends; you will make all ſenſible and diſcerning men as much diſſenters from you, as you are from liberty, ſound policy, rational religion, and true Chriſtianity.

FINIS.

APPENDIX.

An Extract from the writings of Biſhop Hoadley on the ſubject of religious Liberty,—wherein the principles contended for in the foregoing Letter are fully eſtabliſhed.

IF the leaving every man freely, and without reſtraint, to make the beſt of his Bible, be ſuch an unſpeakable unhappineſs, becauſe of the wild conceits coming from ignorance, &c. for God's ſake why was the world diſturbed with a reformation at all, which would indeed have been only the dream or image of a reformation, without claiming this univerſal right of Chriſtians, to all Chriſtians equally? If this be ſuch a terrible conſequence as to juſtify human reſtraints, why was the popiſh reſtraint diſturbed which would have prevented this miſchief more effectually, if reſtraints could do it? Shall we ſtill go on to mock mankind, and tell them that a popiſh reſtraint is indeed bad, but that a proteſtant reſtraint is very good and uſeful; that the Chriſtian people have a right againſt any reſtraint but what we ourſelves lay upon them; that the papiſts cannot judge who

of the laity are capable of the uſe of the ſcriptures, and who not, but that we can; and the like? It is time methinks to leave off ſuch partiality to ourſelves in the caſe of religion, and ſuch inſults upon our brethren, leſt the meaneſt and moſt ignorant of them, by degrees, ſhould come to ſee that we ſpeak as if popiſh reſtraints had been removed, for our own ſakes only and not for theirs. At the time of the reformation, the Chriſtian world was ſunk univerſally, clergy as well as laity, into a conſummate ſtupidity and ignorance, not only as to what is called literature, but as to what is true Chriſtianity. I beg it may be conſidered, firſt by what methods this miſerable ſtate of things was brought to ſuch a pitch; and then, by what methods it *was in ſo great meaſure* cured by the reformation? The anſwer is in one word this, that the cauſe which was ſeen naturally to effect thoſe evils was ſolely the taking away this right of judging from Chriſtians, this ſupremacy which Chriſt veſted in every Chriſtian in his own behalf; and lodging this ſupremacy in one man, or in a council of men over others: this made all enquiries uſeleſs and dangerous. Terrors and reſtraints were added, and neither clergy nor laity were allowed to make the beſt of their Bible. From hence came in neceſſarily a neglect of a matter ſo hazardous and ruinous as ſtudy and conſideration; and from hence, by degrees, an innundation of ſtupidity and ignorance.

But

But when the evil of this came to be not only ſeen but felt to an intolerable degree, how was it cured? Not by preaching up the right of ſome to judge for others in religion; not by pronouncing the neceſſity of reſtraints in the caſe of the uſe of the ſcriptures; not by deſtroying the ſupremacy veſted in every Chriſtian in his own behalf, but by calling upon *all* equally to ſearch the ſcriptures, by teaching that their own perſuaſions would juſtify their choice of church-communion, which they had a right to determine for themſelves; that Chriſt had called them to this true Chriſtian liberty, and had veſted in every one of his followers this ſupremacy, which reſulted from their right to follow their own conſciences in religion, and which it was their duty to exerciſe. It was this, and this alone, which let the beams of divine light into that infernal priſon of darkneſs, ſtupidity, and ignorance, which had enfeebled the eye-ſight, and enſlaved the hearts of mankind ſo long. It was this which revived Chriſtianity as it were from the dead, by ſending all to the fountain and original; and it was this alone which planted and increaſed true knowledge and freedom, inſtead of the blackneſs of darkneſs and the chains of ſlavery. If any *methods have ſince been made uſe of contrary to theſe maxims*, and inconſiſtent with theſe foundations, any reſtraints laid upon this Chriſtian liberty, any diſcouragements to the freedom of enquiry and judgment of Chriſtians, I am ſorry for it. There is juſt ſo much given back to the cauſe of ignorance

and all its conſequences, which muſt of neceſſity gain life, and recover ſtrength juſt in proportion to the diſcouraging univerſal enquiry, and the private judgment of Chriſtians in order to determine their own conduct in religion.

There is no medium in this caſe: either this ſupremacy muſt be lodged in every private Chriſtian in his own behalf, or it muſt be lodged in ſome Chriſtians over others in behalf of others; either Chriſtian liberty muſt be entruſted with Chriſtians for themſelves, ſo that they themſelves muſt bear their own burthen, and anſwer to God for the uſe of what he has granted them, or elſe the Chriſtian liberty of Chriſtians muſt be lodged in the hands of ſuperiors, to diſpenſe, curtail, abridge, or enlarge, juſt as their meaſure of light and judgment, and too often as their intereſt or inclination, humour or paſſion, form their reſolutions.—Either Chriſtians have this right, every man in himſelf, by the principles of reaſon and the nature of true religion, and of the goſpel in particular; or, they have it not. If they have it, it differs in this from their civil rights, that *they themſelves cannot rightfully give up the exerciſe of it.* In civil affairs they can give up the exerciſe of their rights by chuſing, appointing, or conſenting to, an arbitrator, judge, or governor, finally to determine their civil controverſies between man and man; but in the caſe of religion, ſuppoſing them once veſted with the right before-mentioned, it is not in their power to give it up, becauſe reſulting from the

nature

nature of true religion, which requires choice and will in every particular man's own conduct; no one can give it up without deſtroying the foundation of all that can be called religion in men. But if every private Chriſtian has not this right in him, by what methods came ſuperiors to have it? They could not come to be poſſeſſed of it by conceſſion from their inferiors, becauſe inferiors are here ſuppoſed never to have had any ſuch right to give up into the hands of others; and as for any expreſs declaration of the will of God in this caſe, the hardieſt proteſtant has never yet declared *uniformly and in expreſs* words, for a divine right (a right indeed requiring the knowledge, and infallibility, and authority of God himſelf) lodged in any ſuperiors to judge in religion for themſelves and others too, ſo as to preclude others from being finally determined, to conduct themſelves according to their own inward perſuaſion.

Whoever declares this whether he knows it or no, declares himſelf no proteſtant; I do not ſay a papiſt, becauſe there may be ſeveral ſuch as theſe, who intend nothing leſs than popery or foreign uſurpation, which would unhappily put out their eyes, as they put out the eyes of others; and exerciſe that ſupremacy of judging for them which they think intolerable, even whilſt they deſire themſelves to exerciſe it over others.

And farther, whoever thinks to halve this right with their inferiors, to take it away in part, and leave it in part, do but deceive themſelves with

vain words. It is in the nature and reaſon of the thing, an indiviſible point which no human art can poſſibly make otherwiſe, and experience has ſhewn, and will ever ſhew, that it muſt either be left whole, *or in due time* taken away whole; there is no middle way between theſe.—I am ſorry that I have had occaſion to ſay ſo much; but I ſincerely think it my duty to take every occaſion to remind Chriſtians of what alone makes them truly Chriſtians, to engage them to love and value their own real privileges, and not to be jeſted or frighted out of that ſupremacy which God has veſted in every man in his own behalf, and which is ſo far from leading to the deſtruction of Chriſtianity or to the eſtabliſhment of a conſummate ſtupidity and ignorance, that I will preſume to ſay, true Chriſtianity cannot be even ſuppoſed without it; and I am ſure experience ſays, that neither literature nor religious knowledge ever flouriſhed or remained even in their ſhadows after this was once diſcarded. The nation never was I hope ſo weak and ſo regardleſs of the goſpel, as to receive the eccleſiaſtical conſtitution of this realm as the religion delivered by Chriſt —All true conſiſtent proteſtants receive the New Teſtament *only* as containing his religion. This is the religion of Chriſtians conſidered as ſuch, and this alone is their refuge, and the avowed ſtandard of all their notions amidſt their ſeveral and contradictory ſyſtems.—Another thing to be conſidered by all Chriſtians is, that the religion delivered by Chriſt can be juſtly ſupported on-

ly

ly by Chriſt's methods. All the laws and acts of parliament in the world can only ſupport an outward profeſſion of ſomething, which as far as it is received from men, and practiſed as the will of men, is ſo far different from the religion of Chriſt. They may keep up a human conſtitution, and either allure men by temporal rewards to adhere to the outward form of it, or terrify men by temporal inconveniences from departing from it, or indiſpoſe men by both from examining at all what it is for their eaſe and their intereſt to take as it is offered to them. But the religion delivered by Chriſt as ſuch, is not concerned in ſuch laws. It ſubſiſted, the ſincere profeſſion of it ſubſiſted, not only without, but often againſt human laws; which is a demonſtration that whatever it is that ſuch laws are neceſſary to preſerve, it is not the religion delivered by Chriſt, nor ought the people to be ſo impoſed on as to be made to believe this.—I know better what a true affection to the church of England *in its preſent condition* imports, than to make it conſiſt in thinking it given down immediately from Heaven, pure and blameleſs, without ſpot or wrinkle; and I know better, I hope, my duty to God and to Chriſt, than to proſtitute the honour of the goſpel to that of any human conſtitution in the world. I ſhall leave to others the glory of putting the eccleſiaſtical conſtitution of this realm and the religion delivered by Chriſt for ſynonymous terms, and content myſelf with the reproach of thinking the religion delivered by him to be ſome-

thing very different from all conſtitutions of realms; ſomething which all Chriſtians in common ought to appeal to, and to be determined by, amidſt all their ſeveral ſchemes and ſyſtems; ſomething of quite another nature than what can be ſupported by their ſeveral acts, and ſtatutes, and laws framed in the different countries of this world, according to their ſeveral notions in favour of contradictory conſtitutions; and ſomething which is beſt and moſt effectually preſerved according to the will of Chriſt, by methods agreeable to the ſpirit of the goſpel. See Hoadley's Rights of Subjects, paſſim.

A Let-

A Letter on the maintainance of the clergy, and the project of appointing biſhops in America, by a gentleman highly reſpected in the literary world, republiſhed from a public paper of the 3d June, 1772.

SIR,

I Underſtand from the public papers, that in the debates on the bill for relieving the Diſſenters in the point of ſubſcription to the Church Articles, ſundry reflections were thrown out againſt the people, importing, " that they themſelves are of a perſecuting intolerant ſpirit, for that when they had the ſuperiority, they perſecuted the church, and ſtill perſecute it in America, where they compel its members to pay taxes for maintaining the Preſbyterian or Independent worſhip, and at the ſame time refuſe them a toleration in the full exerciſe of their religion, by the adminiſtrations of a biſhop.

If we look back into hiſtory for the character of the preſent ſects in Chriſtianity, we ſhall find few that have not, in their turns, been perſecutors and complainers of perſecution. The primitive Chriſtians thought perſecution extremely wrong in the Pagans, but practiſed it on one another. The firſt Proteſtants of the Church of England blamed perſecution in the Romiſh church, but practiſed it againſt the Puritans: theſe found it wrong in the biſhops,

biſhops, but fell into the ſame practice both here and in New England. To account for this, we ſhould remember, that the doctrine of *toleration* was not then known, or had not prevailed in the world. Perſecution was therefore not ſo much the fault of the ſect as of the times. It was not in thoſe days deemed wrong *in itſelf*. The general opinion was only, that thoſe *who are in error* ought not to perſecute *the truth*: but the *poſſeſſors of truth* were in the right to perſecute *error*, in order to deſtroy it. Thus every ſect believing itſelf poſſeſſed of *all truth*, and that every tenet differing from theirs was *error*, conceived that when the power was in their hands, perſecution was a duty required of them by that God whom they ſuppoſed to be offended with hereſy.—By degrees more moderate *and more modeſt* ſentiments have taken place in the Chriſtian world; and among Proteſtants particularly, all diſclaim perſecution, none vindicate it, and few practiſe it. We ſhould then ceaſe to reproach each other with what was done by our anceſtors, but judge of the preſent character of ſects or churches by their *preſent conduct* only.

Now to determine on the juſtice of this charge againſt the preſent diſſenters, particularly thoſe in America, let us conſider the following facts. They went from England to eſtabliſh a new country for themſelves, *at their own expence*, where they might enjoy the free exerciſe of religion in their own way. When they had purchaſed the

territory

territory of the natives, they granted the lands out in townſhips, requiring for it neither purchaſe-money nor quit-rent, but this condition only to be complied with, that the freeholders ſhould ſupport a goſpel miniſter (meaning probably one of the then governing ſects) and a free-ſchool within the townſhip. Thus, what is commonly called Preſbyterianiſm became the *eſtabliſhed religion* of that country. All went on well in this way, while the ſame religious opinions were general, the ſupport of miniſter and ſchool being raiſed by a proportionate tax on the lands. But, in proceſs of time, ſome becoming Quakers, ſome Baptiſts, and of late years, ſome returning to the Church of England (through the laudable endeavours and a *proper application* of their funds by the ſociety for propagating the goſpel), objections were made to the payment of a tax appropriated to the ſupport of a church they diſapproved and had forſaken. The civil magiſtrates, however, continued for a time to collect and apply the tax according to the original laws which remained in force ; and they did it the more freely, as thinking it juſt and equitable that the holders of lands ſhould pay what was contracted to be paid when they were granted, as the only conſideration for the grant, and what had been conſidered by all ſubſequent purchaſers as a perpetual incumbrance on the eſtate, bought therefore at a proportionably cheaper rate ; a payment which, it was thought, no honeſt man ought to avoid, under pretence of his having changed his religious

religious perſuaſion. And this, I ſuppoſe, is one of the beſt grounds of demanding tythes of diſſenters now in England. But the practice being clamoured againſt by the epiſcopalians as perſecution, the legiſlature of the province of Maſſachuſets Bay, near thirty years ſince, paſſed an act for their relief, requiring, indeed, the tax to be paid as uſual, but directing that the ſeveral ſums levied from members of the Church of England, ſhould be paid over to the miniſter of that church with whom ſuch members uſually attended divine worſhip, which miniſter had power given him to receive, and, on occaſion, *to recover the ſame by law.*

It ſeems that legiſlature conſidered the end of the tax was, to ſecure and improve the morals of the people, and promote their happineſs by ſupporting among them the public worſhip of God and the preaching of the goſpel; that where particular people fancied a particular mode, that mode might probably therefore, be of moſt uſe to thoſe people; and that if the good was done, it was not ſo material in what mode or by whom it was done. The conſideration that their brethren, the diſſenters in England, were ſtill compelled to pay tythes to the clergy of the church, had not weight enough with the legiſlature to prevent this moderate act, which ſtill continues in full force, and I hope no uncharitable conduct of the church toward the diſſenters will ever provoke them to repeal it.

With regard to a biſhop, I know not upon what ground the diſſenters, either here or in America,

rica, are charged with refuſing the benefit of ſuch an officer to the church in that country. *Here* they ſeem to have naturally no concern in the affair. *There* they have no power to prevent it, if government ſhould think fit to ſend one. They would probably *diſlike*, indeed, to ſee an order of men eſtabliſhed among them, from whoſe perſecutions their fathers fled into that wilderneſs, and whoſe future domination they might poſſibly fear, *not knowing that their natures are changed.* But the non-appointment of biſhops for America ſeems to ariſe from another quarter. The ſame wiſdom of government, probably, that prevents the ſitting of convocations, and forbids, by *noli proſequi's*, the perſecution of Diſſenters for non-ſubſcription, avoids eſtabliſhing biſhops where the minds of people are not yet prepared to receive them cordially, leſt the public peace ſhould be endangered.

And now let us ſee how this *perſecution-account* ſtands between the parties.

In New England, where the legiſlative bodies are almoſt to a man diſſenters from the Church of England :

1. There is no teſt to prevent churchmen holding offices.

2. The ſons of churchmen have the full benefit of the univerſities.

3. The taxes for ſupport of public worſhip, when paid by churchmen, are given to the epiſcopal miniſter.

In

In Old England:

1. Diſſenters are excluded from all offices of profit and honour.

2. The benefits of education in the univerſities are appropriated to the ſons of churchmen.

3. The clergy of the diſſenters receive none of the tythes paid by their people, who muſt be at the additional charge of maintaining their own ſeparate worſhip.—

But it is ſaid, that the diſſenters of America *oppoſe* the introduction of a biſhop.

In fact, it is not alone the diſſenters there that give the oppoſition (if *not encouraging* muſt be termed *oppoſing*) but the laity in general diſlike the project, and ſome even of the clergy. The inhabitants of Virginia are almoſt all epiſcopalians. The church is fully eſtabliſhed there, and the council and general aſſembly are, perhaps to a man, its members, yet, when lately at a meeting of the clergy, a reſolution was taken to apply for a biſhop, againſt which ſeveral, however, proteſted; the aſſembly of the province, at the next meeting, expreſſed their diſapprobation of the thing in the ſtrongeſt manner, by unanimouſly ordering the thanks of the houſe to the proteſters; for many of the American laity of the church think it ſome advantage whether their own young men come to England for ordination, and improve themſelves at the ſame time by converſation with the learned here, or the congregations are ſupplied by Engliſhmen who have had the benefit of education in Engliſh univerſities,

verſities, and are ordained before they come abroad. They do not, therefore, ſee the neceſſity of a biſhop merely for ordination, and confirmation is among them deemed a ceremony of no very great importance, ſince few ſeek it in England, where biſhops are in plenty. Theſe ſentiments prevail with many churchmen there, not to promote a deſign which they think muſt ſooner or later ſaddle them with great expences to ſupport it. As to the diſſenters their minds might probably be more conciliated to the meaſure if the biſhops here ſhould, in their wiſdom and goodneſs, think fit to ſet their ſacred character in a more friendly light, by dropping their oppoſition to the diſſenters' application for relief in ſubſcription, and declaring their willingneſs that diſſenters ſhould be capable of offices, enjoy the benefit of education in the univerſities, and the privilege of appropriating their tythes to the ſupport of their own clergy. In all theſe points of toleration, they appear far behind the preſent diſſenters of New England, and it may ſeem to ſome a ſtep below the dignity of biſhops, to follow the example of ſuch inferiors. I do not, however, deſpair of their doing it ſome time or other, ſince nothing of the kind is too hard for *true Chriſtian humility*.

I am, Sir, your's, &c.

A NEW-ENGLAND-MAN.

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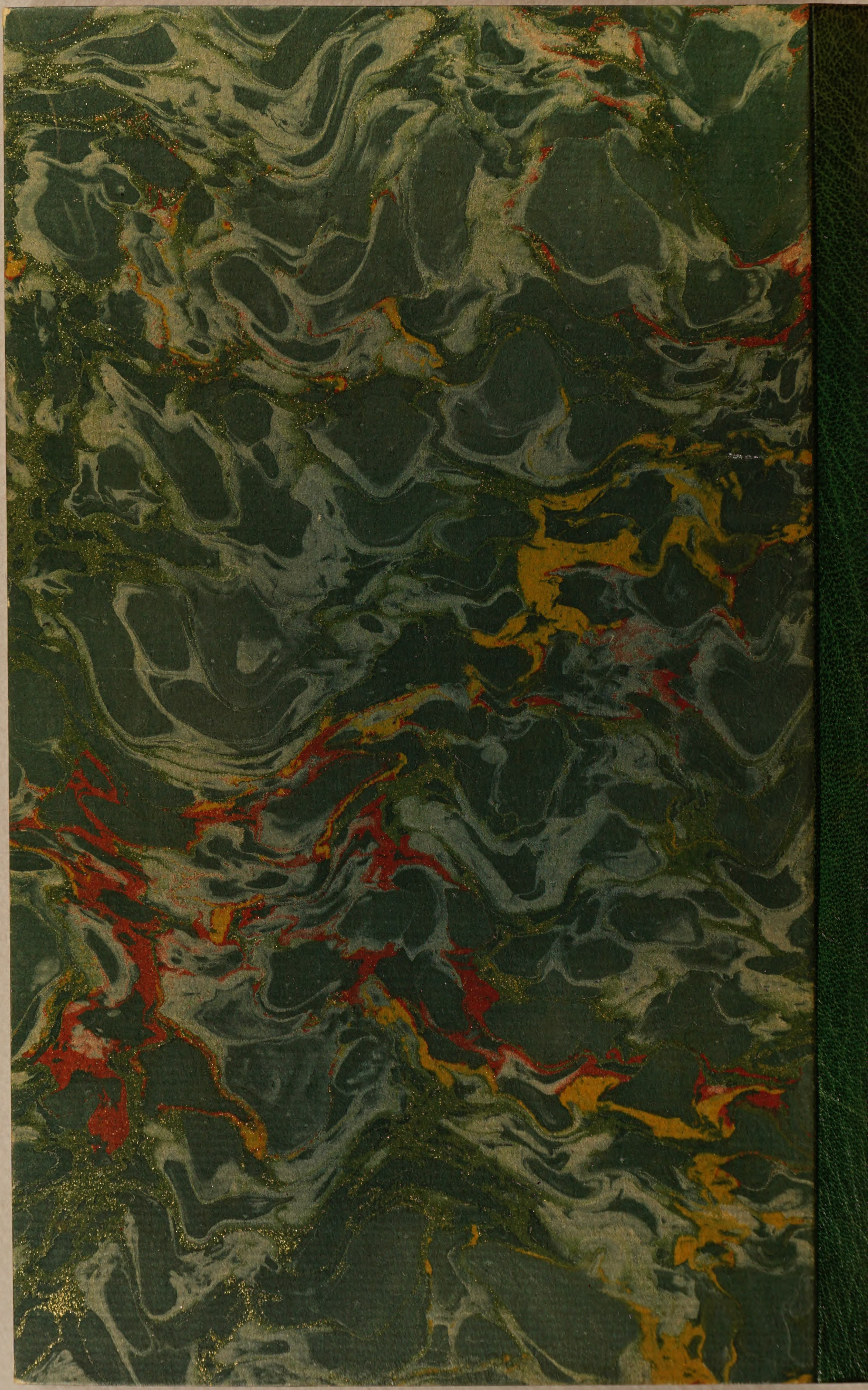
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